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MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS;

A TALE OF THE YEAR 1830.

What gay ideas crowd the vacant brain,
When Peers, and Dukes, and all their sweeping train
Garters, and Stars and Coronets appear,
And in soft sounds "Your Grace" salutes the ear!

RAPE OF THE LOCK.

Mrs. Colburn *Vol. III.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

HENRY COLBURN AND RICHARD BENTLEY,
NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1831.

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C. Whiting, Beaufort House, Strand.

MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS.

CHAPTER I.

Hear the pretty ladies talk—

Tittle tattle—tittle tattle!—

Like their pattens when they walk—

Pittle pattle—pittle pattle!

Dr. Darwin.

IN pursuance with the will of General De Vesci, the establishment of the young heiress, both at Bensleigh and in Portman-square, was maintained on the same footing his own had formerly occupied; and in pursuance with her own, she was for some time permitted to mark her respect towards his memory, by refraining from those scenes of folly and dissipation in

which her mother and her sisters were but too eager to renew their labour of pleasure. Until the attainment of her majority, a liberal allowance had been assigned her by the providence of her kind uncle. It was settled and defined, indeed, beyond the interference even of her guardians; and the first deed of her independence was to secure a large portion of this to Lady Maria and her daughters; as an evidence of gratitude, she said, for their kindness in consenting to become her inmates.

By this liberality of conduct, she succeeded in reconciling them, as much as possible, to the circumstances which had so materially and so unexpectedly elevated her fortunes above their own; and next to finding themselves in their own persons the heiresses of Bensleigh, they were satisfied to be pointed out as sisters to "the rich Miss De Vesci;" a change of designation to which Minnie had been compelled by the testamentary injunctions of her uncle.—Excepting indeed that her equipages and opera

box were hired and purchased in her name, they were more at the service of Claudia and Eleanor than at her own.

Meanwhile Lady Maria, who saw that it was equally her personal interest to get rid of her elder daughters by matrimony, and to hug her youngest to her heart in single blessedness, disposed herself for the eager prosecution of this twofold measure. Like a skilful general, she addressed herself in the first instance to the numeration and disposition of her forces; calculating with callous selfishness those deductions of "killed and wounded" which Time—the general enemy—had gradually made in the sum total of her London acquaintance. Her Ladyship had now perambulated the thorny ways of the world, for more than fifty years; and had reason to boast herself one of

The wisest fools much time has ever made !

It was amazing the store of poisoned honey she had managed to hive within the cells of her

worldly brain ; it was astonishing the quantity of shreds and patches of plausible sophistry, with which she had contrived to envelop the paltry selfishness of her disposition. She made it appear to the whole world that she had sacrificed herself in disinterested martyrdom, in order to secure General De Vesci's fortune to one of her three beloved children : and while she carefully hoarded her jointure with a view to future Dowager contingencies, she seemed solely bent upon guarding the interests of her daughter, to the total neglect of her own views and feelings. On returning to England in all the mediocrity of her former position, she had affected an air of haughty finery in order to blind the observation of society ; but as the mother of Miss De Vesci, and the virtual mistress of a magnificent establishment, she immediately adopted an ingratiating tone of humble simplicity, equally artificial, and consequently equally offensive to good taste and good feeling.

Unfortunately Lady Maria's temper and

health had not improved with her social tactics. A long life of late hours and dissipated habits, had tended to enfeeble and sour both the one and the other; and she was only the more inclined to quarrel with the necessity which protracted her duties as chaperon far beyond the utmost limit of patience she had anticipated. On the Continent, thanks to early hours and the easy tone adopted in the modes of general reception, the labours of such a vocation are charmingly mitigated; but on returning to the stately and formidable gaieties of a London season; her Ladyship began to reflect with peevish dismay upon those rheumatic symptoms, and bilious headaches, and nervous attacks, which already began to emulate the valetudinarian destinies of her mother poor old Lady De Vesci. Under these circumstances she could neither pass the gates of Lisborough House, nor the equipage of Lady Wyndham, without an internal commotion of fury against her own unmarried daughters!—

Of their successful rivals in both these quarters, Claudia and Eleanor, during their long residence on the Continent, had been unable to gather any very explicit intelligence. They had learned from the letters of their cousin Mary Willingham, that Sir William Wyndham, the solid and stolid member for the county of Kent, had consoled himself for his numerous disappointments immediately after their departure from Spa, by a precipitate union with little, silly, giggling, flirting, Emily Lorimer! From her brother Frederick's information, they discovered at Naples, that she had already enriched the family tree at Wyndham Park with olive-branches to an incredible amount; and that by one of those strange transitions peculiar, as it would seem, to the female nature of England—the giddy thoughtless girl had sobered down at once, into a homely domestic matron. Emily Lorimer had, rushed from the ball-room to the altar, with the love of a diamond necklace and a Brussels veil before her eyes:—while Lady

Wyndham was satisfied to devote herself to the after-dinner society of her snoring husband ; —to the adulation of her head-nurse—and to the vociferous claims of four frightful ill-managed children !—

Of the Duchess of Lisborough, meanwhile, they had thought far more, and heard still less. They knew from the reports of many an aristocratic wanderer in Italy, as well as from occasional paragraphs in Galignani's Messenger, that her Grace occasionally "entertained the fashionable world ;"—and progressed with becoming regularity between London and Calmersfield—between Lisborough Hall and Macclesfield Priory—and so on, *ad infinitum*, throughout all the demesnes, halls, parks, courts, and castles, apportioned by the lavish prodigality of fortune to the illustrious House of Lorton. They were also aware that Her Grace's *ménage* had remained childless ; and that the voice of society had long stigmatized her as "a very exemplary young woman." The word *stigmatized* may

perhaps appear on such an occasion, to be an error of the press; but be it known that the term "young woman," qualified by so sober an adjective as "exemplary," and pronounced in a certain tone, by a certain set, is purposed to be the most impertinent definition in the world! All charming, or delightful, or fascinating, or enchanting personages, are apostrophized as "*creatures*," or as "*beings*."

It was merely, however, as a matter of idle curiosity, that Claudia or Eleanor had sought for any information on the subject. From the very moment that their own views upon any noble or wealthy *célibataire* were decidedly circumvented by some other alliance, he was destined to sink at once to the level of their general and indifferent acquaintance; unless, by his supereminence of rank and opulence, his wife appeared an eligible object of intimacy;—in which case, they were quite ready to become her bosom friends on the shortest notice. They had already determined to regain, if possible,

their former footing at Lisborough House ;—but as to Lady Wyndham—excepting as a last resource by way of chaperon, during one of Mamma's rheumatic attacks, she was far too humdrum to be either useful or ornamental in their service !

It was May ; warm, beaming, joyous, budding, buoyant May !—and, even in the metropolis, that genial month makes itself both felt and heard and respired, rich with the odours and sunshine of renovated nature. The squares, yet untarnished with the filthy defilement of soot, and of that unique compound which defines itself as London dust, were quivering with the light verdure of their delicate lime-trees, and bright with the tufted blossoms of their early shrubs. The groves of Kensington Gardens had already thrown up their pyramidal clusters of chesnut-bloom ; the cuckoo was heard anew amid their lonelier glades ; the Parks were overspread with that freshness of verdure which, for a single fortnight, defies the wandering tread of busy thousands ; and balco-

nies trimly decorated with a profusion of "the scented weed—the Frenchman's darling," overpowered for a time even the motley odours of the public streets.

At such a moment, London may be regarded as in its prime of pride. The season is before us, unsullied by one among the countless disappointments destined to thwart the smoothness of its aftercourse. HOPE, like a new-fledged Phoenix, flutters around the scene, reflecting the bright-hued radiance of its wings upon a thousand objects of inferior attraction. The beauty, in her first season of triumph, listens to the whispers of adulation with sparkling eye and flushing cheek, and a heart yet unsated by their monotony; and young ladies who, like Claudia and Eleanor Willingham, have welcomed for half a dozen successive years the promises of that auspicious month without remembering their mischievous fallacy of the preceding spring, find all their sanguine expectations renovated with its lilacs and labur-

nums, its new fashions, new follies—drawing-rooms, and *déjeuners*!—

It is extraordinary how, year after year, the same routine of dissipation manages to afford a promise of novelty to the same human beings! There are Dowagers shaking their palsied heads among the coteries of London, who for fifty years have annually predicted “a good season,” or “a brilliant season;”—have annually besieged the doors of some fashionable milliner for her last-invented hat, and suggested to Rundell some alteration in the play of their antediluvian diamond earrings; regardless that these evanescent glories will be displayed in the same box of the same opera-house—in the same hubbub of satin trains and court-plumes—in the well-worn saloons of Devonshire House, or of Lady Salisbury’s stately mob!—Yet even these, and such as these, welcome the buds of the early May with sanguine anticipations of renewed festivity; and my Lord, with his grey heirs—increasing corpulency, and decreasing leg—rushes

to the commencement of his forty-fifth Session, and stumbles up the steps of Boodle's, or Brookes's, at the spring dawn of a new season, with the same eager inquiries respecting the last Speaker's levee—the merits of the exhibition at Somerset House—the promises of Epsom, and the probabilities of Ascot—which have graced his *entrée* for forty successive years.

Among all these mental delusions, those of the ball-haunting young ladies are by far the most accountable and the most excusable. There is always a bright succession of heirs-apparent to renew their speculations. Every spring, Oxford—and Cambridge—and the grand tour—refresh the fashionable hotels with their quota of silly boys, eager to be ruined or to be married, as the weakness of their heads or hearts may predominate. Every autumn carries a few paralytic fathers and gouty old uncles to their marble homes; and new Viscounts, and inheriting Baronets spring up like champignons, to be devoured by the tender famine of damsels

on their preferment. We will therefore forgive the sanguine earnestness with which every girl, on arriving in London for the season, firmly believes that it will be her last;—that some young nobleman who has been acting charades with her every evening during the Christmas holidays, is only waiting for the familiar facilities of a May Fair ball-room to hazard his proposals; and that the white crape dress quilled by the fairy fingers of Maradan, which hangs beside her dressing-table in tempting preparation for the evening's ball, will complete the conquest which her "witchery of noble horsemanship" has more than half achieved in the course of the morning, beside the translucent waves of the glassy Serpentine.

The Miss Willinghams were more than usually self-confiding on the present occasion. Never before had they entered the arena with such appliances and means to boot, as graced their present entrée. During their former London experience they had been dependent on obliging

Dowagers, and condescending friends, for more than half their means of amusement ;—they had now only to sigh or smile—to come or go—according to the suggestions of their own caprice ; and they acknowledged no existing obstruction to their happiness and projects, excepting Lady Maria's occasional fits of bilious contrariousness, and Minnie's scrupulous prudery in refusing to enliven her lamented uncle's mansion with the riot of balls and private theatricals.

So little do we know ourselves ! and so utterly misappreciate the opinions of the world touching our attractions and means of captivation !—Claudia remained wholly unconscious of the disparition of that exquisite bloom of youthful loveliness which, five years before, had kept the pillow of many a lordling and many a guardsman sleepless on the successive Wednesday nights which irradiated Almack's with her presence ; and Eleanor was utterly unaware of the manifestation of a thousand *points* of her graceful figure, which had been formerly veiled by

the well-rounded firmness of juvenile health. The yellow tinge occasionally visible after a prolonged vigil of the night before—the languid eye confessing the absence of the tameless energies of girlhood—the parched lip fevered by the anxieties of interest ;—these they dreamed not of !—or they might have learned to rejoice in the habits of seclusion adopted by the radiant and lovely Miss De Vesci, whose immediate rivalship would have betrayed their every deficiency. Such, however, is the self-relying blindness of the human kind, that even *then* they might have perchance exulted in the consciousness of superior self-possession, and knowledge of the world ; and of that nameless something or nothing, which constitutes the airy elegance of *bon ton* !

On the evening of the first ball, which—as the signal of their re-inauguration into the mysteries of the London *beau-monde*—was a moment of considerable importance in their estimation, Minnie announced her intention of

seeking her own amusement by drinking tea with Lady Lorimer ; whose daughters were both married—whose Noble Lord had now become an evening fixture beneath the faded tapestries of St. Stephen's—and whose amiable self, confined to her easy chair by a paralytic seizure, still retained all that feminine and dignified composure of character and demeanour, which is one of the most beautiful attributes of matronly maturity. Her daughters, who tenderly loved her, in spite of their mental incapability of estimating the extent of her moral worth, eagerly resorted to her sedentary presence for counsel and sympathy in all the cares and all the predominating happiness of their prosperous households ; Frederick, her eldest son, confided in her bosom with tender respect every secret of his mind and heart ; and George—the younger—who had fulfilled his original vocation, and become a reverend prebendary under sanction of Lord Lorimer's ministerial patronage, already formed the sustaining prop of her aspirations

after joys of a less worldly character. She was indeed a happy mother! but she deserved to be so; for through life she had been at once an enduring wife, and the woman of the world the least devoted to her own selfish comforts and enjoyments!

“Well, my dear sister!” said Minnie, on entering the dressing-room where her sisters were sipping their coffee, and crumbling their *brioche*s at two o’clock on the following day; “did Lady Ravenswood’s ball answer your expectations?—did you find many of your former friends, and have you made any new engagements which promise well for your amusement?”

“Sit down—sit down,” exclaimed Eleanor, clearing away a litter of new novels, new music, *billets*, bills, and patterns of silk, from a sofa near the table, “and we will describe the whole affair. But in the first place, how did *you* get through your evening with Lady Lorimer?”

“So quickly—so much *too* quickly—that I can scarcely remember any thing about it.”

“And with what assistance?—Tea, scandal, and backgammon?”

“Not one of the three! No!

We talked with open heart and mind,
Affectionate and true—
A pair of friends!—though I was young,
And Matthew seventy-two,”

replied Minnie, laughing.

“Hush! hush! hush!—both the *liaison* and the quotation are so cruelly akin to cousin Mary’s solemnities, Dearest Minnie! for the love of mercy do not let them drill you into one of the water-gruel school!”

“Well then—at least amend my errors by some insight into the proceedings of your own fashionable world.—The ball, Nelly—the ball?”

“Was really surprisingly passable! Considering that we are in London, and at the beginning of the season—when and where the machinery of society generally moves with so much difficulty—we had a very lively, well-imagined, and agreeable party. All the world

was there, and in good humour with itself and us."

"*Apparemment on vous a fait fête !*"

"We are novelties just now—fresh from the Carnival—bright from a regeneration at Herbert's ! Like Beau Clincher on his road from the Jubilee, people crowd round us to look at our swimming-girdle."

"What can you possibly mean ?" inquired Claudia, opening her large blue eyes.

"That every one is dying to see whether the heiress of Bensleigh's sisters are the same human beings who were thought so little of in Seymour-street, five years ago. I assure you, Minnie, 'Miss De Vesci' had honourable mention on all sides ; on our *entrée* into Lady Ravenswood's beaming ball-room, I heard your name murmured from the north, the south, the west, and the east. And when, in reply to some fifty invitations which were forced upon Mamma in the course of half as many seconds, she gave out that her youngest daughter did not at pre-

sent purpose to join in the amusements of the fashionable world, we sank at once full twenty per cent. in the general estimation of the room."

"But not until you had secured your invitations, I trust?" inquired Minnie, with mock solemnity.

"Oh! no; but there was nothing very brilliant or tempting among them;—on our own account (Herbaut included) we were fairly and intrinsically worth them all."

"Have you entered them into your engagement book?"

"After breakfast you shall assist in the operation. *En attendant*, let me tell you *who* were the most eager in their inquiries after Miss De Vesci; and who the most promising for ourselves, in the way of partners, flirts, bore-drudges, and"—

"Bore-drudges? What manner of animal is that?"

"Humdrums! whom it is both useful and necessary to attach to one's train; in order that

one may not waste the time, or lose the society of some more eligible friend, in fetching the carriage and looking for the shawls."

"Thank you ;—pray proceed. Had you Sir Joseph there, and Mary ?"

"Sir Joseph—*à propos*, of course, to the humdrums ?—Yes ! my uncle was there in the early part of the evening ; and I am forced to admit that Mary Willingham has acquired a graceful ease of manner, which envelops her ugliness like the elegant drapery of a veil. She dresses, too, much better than formerly ; and wears that splendid set of pearls, which Mamma used to regret so bitterly among the Heddeston heirlooms."

"And what business has Mary with the heirlooms ?" inquired Claudia, peevishly.

"Oh ! Mr. Willingham insists upon her receiving all the homage and honours due to the mistress of Heddeston."

"Was my cousin Charles at Lady Ravenswood's ?"

“I do not know him by sight,” replied the listless Claudia. “I never saw him excepting at that one odious fête at Ebury, a thousand years ago.”

“Were you not in the room when he called here last week?”

“One never looks at an unavailable cousin; particularly one so frightful and philosophical as Charles Willingham.”

“Nevertheless, he *was* at Lady Ravenswood’s ball,” interrupted Eleanor. “*I* renewed my former acquaintance with him, although almost repenting my condescension, when I found the extent to which he managed to prolong his inquiries respecting Miss De Vesci, and the motives of her absence.”

“At least, I trust he did not call me Miss De Vesci?”

“He did indeed; and I curtailed his process of cross-examination respecting your proceedings, by acquainting him that you were busy at home with Lady Lorimer—signing and sealing

despatches to the British Embassy at Naples."

"A representation which you knew to be incorrect!" said Minnie, with a heightened complexion.

"And which swelled our prudish cousin Charlie into precisely such an air of indignation as you assume just now!—But to return to something better worth talking of—to the ball and our partners!"

"You cannot imagine," observed Claudia, "what a melancholy spectacle is afforded by the skeleton of our old set."

"Lady Robert Lorton?"

"Is not yet come to town. But there is Lady Grayfield—far gone in methodism;—Lady Wroxton—"

"I do not remember the name of Lady Wroxton."

"The *ci-devant* Mrs. Grandison; who, having buried her little vulgar fussy banker, has bestowed her scrip, omnium, and self, upon one

of her former *cavalieri serventi*, a Sir Cæsar Wroxton ; who uses her—I will not say like a dog—for his *own* hounds are far more tenderly cared for—but as so degraded a woman deserves to be used.”

“Then of our former partners,” continued Claudia, “the *beau reste* is any thing but *beau*. Sir Comyne Wallace is grown lank and lean ; and has acquired that languid, *blasé*, smoke-withered look which hot club-rooms, and English fare, and English hours, are sure to inflict.”

“English fare ! Surely Henry Mulgrave is a far better specimen of the effects of the roast beef-and-sherry regimen ! The little nightingale has grown as plump, and as red, and as coarse, as a widgeon.”

“Then Count Russell has dandified his grizzled head under a Brutus wig ; and his *sucre* compliments are now incomprehensibly murmured through the interstices of several of those ivory teeth which formed his best patrimony, but which have paid the debt of nature. How-

ever, he has wisely given up his beauship ; and is now a dining-out, conversation-man—stuffed to the very cravat with pauper colonies and political economy.”

“Of all Lady Robert’s set, Mr. Tichborne is perhaps the least altered.”

“Mr. Tichborne !” exclaimed Miss De Vesci.

“Is that wretch still in society ?”

“In the most supreme vogue of fashion.”

“And what has become of that poor wretched Lady Barringhurst ?”

“Divorced — degraded — deceived — abandoned—*forgotten* !”

“And Mr. Tichborne is still received with favour by all her former friends ?”

“Of course—the divers destinies of men and women have decreed that the vices which form a triumph for one sex, should ensure an unredeemable sentence of reprobation for the other. The *new* Lady Barringhurst was there.”

“Her Lord married again too ?—he is a bold man !”

“*Que voulez vous?*—what could he do with his six motherless children?”

“And Lady Desmond?”

“Barbara, you know, is now Lady Cosmo Somerset; and still the happiest and most charming little creature in the world.”

“And her mother?”

“Is perpetually vibrating between the characters of a devotee and a blue-stockings!—She cannot make up her mind which of the two to adopt;—her natural disposition inclines her towards the latter; but whenever she gets a toothach, or a fit of nervousness or of the blue-devils, she balances in favour of the former vocation.”

“And who, my dear Minnie, who of all London do you imagine to be at its head of the fashionable administration?”

“Why do you give her impossible difficulties to solve?” interrupted Eleanor.

“Pray let me guess!” said Minnie, humouring their folly. “I am of course ambitious to prove

my skill in feminine augury ;—the gigantic Lady Radbourne, for a *maravedi* ! ”

“ A Daniel !—a second Daniel !—Lady Radbourne has positively tontined to the top of the ladder ; and I cannot persuade any body even to recollect that they ever called her *mauvais ton*. ”

“ And the young Duchess of Lisborough—has she advanced or retrograded in the calendar of fashionable beatification ? ”

“ She is well spoken of—but appears to possess little or no influence in the sphere she ought to rule with unlimited sway. ”

“ Perhaps her Grace is moderate in her demands ; and

‘ Has her humour best when she *obeys* ! ’ ”

“ Then does she indeed differ strangely from the majority of her sex ! But we shall soon determine the point on our own experience.—Lady Robert Lorton is expected in town within the week ; and we have already received morn-

ing and evening cards from Lisborough House. I own I am impatient for the result; I am exceedingly anxious to see how 'Benedict' acquits himself as 'the married man!'"

CHAPTER II.

Of temper as envenomed as an asp,
Censorious, and her every word a wasp ;
In faithful memory she records the crimes
Or real, or fictitious of the times ;
Laughs at the reputations she has torn,
And holds them dangling at arm's length in scorn !

Cowper.

MISS De Vesci did not find her determination of temporary seclusion from the world very vehemently opposed, either by her mother or sisters; Lady Maria being anxious to retain her as long as possible beneath the undivided influence of her own counsels; and the Miss Willinghams being impatient "like the Turk," of "sisters near the throne." They soon ceased

to molest her; and continued to seek their own circle of friends, and their own round of amusements—leaving Minnie to the happy enjoyment of her harmless pursuits and unassuming connexions.

Now although the lovely heiress of Bensleigh was fully aware of the rupture which untoward circumstances had conspired to make between herself and her cousin Charles Willingham, the friend and protector of her childhood—she was totally unconscious of the change of feeling entertained towards her by Mary—her second or rather her third mother, and decidedly her best and kindest friend. So little indeed did she conjecture that her position relatively to her young guardian could be any matter of surprise or disquiet to Mary, that she failed not upon every renewal of confidential conversation between them, to enlarge upon his merits, to revert to his opinion, and to assure her cousin “she was far from doing justice to the merits and attractions of Frederick Lorimer.”

“It was yourself and Charles,” she would say, “whose eulogies first induced me to break through the ice of English reserve in his favour, and to draw him into my uncle’s society; but now that I have learned to know him by my own perceptions, I feel that neither of you have rendered him ample justice.”

“Neither of us can pretend to *your* enthusiasm of feeling on any subject,” replied Miss Willingham, mildly. “Still my dear Minnie, I cannot but think that we have been fully conscious of Mr. Lorimer’s valuable qualities.”

Poor Mary!—to stand accused of moderation in Frederick’s favour!—She who, for his sake, had renounced so many brilliant prospects, endured so many domestic reproaches, and wasted away the buoyant hours of her youth in solitary repining!—No, no!—she felt that she *had* indeed rendered him ample justice;—and that the rising pretensions of the heiress of Bensleigh, in depriving her of all hope of profiting by her long ordeal of patient

self-resignation, had only added one additional point of anguish to her iron cincture of penance.

There was nothing which Miss De Vesci more truly enjoyed than to escape from the heartless parade of her own gorgeous home unto the chastened calmness of the commonplace abode which had sheltered her childhood ; and where she still believed herself to be secure of sympathy and affection. It is true that no brilliancy of fashionable levity mingled with its details ; that no flippant wit enlivened its discourse ; that no hardened women of the world lent the bold fronts of their dashing effrontery to its circle ; that no young men of *ton* made it the forlorn resort of their lounging impertinence. There was no attraction there beyond cousin Mary's gentle smile and soothing counsels ;—cousin Mary—surrounded by her books, her work, her music, her easel, her flowers, her birds ! But thus had Minnie beheld her, even from infancy ;—sufficing to her own amusement—yet ever ready to lay aside her favourite pursuits

and occupations in order to contribute to the happiness of others. There was no boring Sir Joseph—no Mr. Willingham to interrupt either their stitchery or their gossipry. The former had taken a turn by no means unusual among stupid elderly gentlemen, and had become a member of all the scientific institutions, and learned societies incorporated in the metropolis; where the respectability of his name and fortune gave him a sort of factitious dignity;—and where he was wont to sit blinking with as much silence and solemnity, as an owl tortured by the sunshine for the edification of little holiday boys and girls at the Zoological Gardens.

If the avocations of his son were more effective, they were neither less peremptory nor less engrossing. Charles Willingham was in fact enrolled in that Holy Army of Martyrs called the independent members of the House. He was a patriot in the purest sense of the word; a diligent although an undemonstrative searcher

into public abuses ; a rare but very influential speaker ; and altogether and exclusively devoted to duties which, for the most part, are undertaken as a matter of faction—a matter of routine—or a matter of listless indifference. Charles was a nominal inmate of his father's mansion in Grosvenor-square ; but his popularity in society rarely allowed him to dine at home ; his evenings were engrossed by parliamentary interests, and his mornings by the studies requisite to their maintenance. Sometimes, indeed, he would steal half an hour from his daily exercise to inquire into Mary's pursuits and pleasures, and to cross-examine her respecting the conduct and character maintained in society by his aunt and cousins ; but Miss De Vesci's arrival was the unfailing signal for his immediate escape. Mary, in her turn, would sometimes tax him with an envious indifference towards the interests of his friend Frederick ; and remind him that Mr. Lorimer had solemnly appealed to his aid, in watching over Minnie's happiness and

demeanour. But her disinterested—her *generous* zeal was unavailing!

“Minnie is far too self-opinionated to bow to any suggestion of mine,” was his constant reply. “Besides, she dawdles away half her time with poor, paralytic Lady Lorimer; her future mother-in-law is surely her best guide: and no one can be better qualified than her Ladyship to counsel or comfort her in any emergency to which she may be reduced by her own wilful disposition.”

Now, although Mr. Willingham was certainly both rash and premature in thus decidedly assigning the excellent Lady Lorimer as Miss De Vesci’s future mother-in-law and present guide, there *did* exist a person out of the circle of her own family, who considered herself peculiarly authorized to busy herself in the legislation of Minnie’s conduct and affairs. Lady Monteagle was one of those tough

Dowagers

Long withering out a young man’s revenue,

who appear to be as immortally evergreen and

nevergreen as the hedges of yew or cypress in their own old-fashioned shrubberies. It was many years since any person but herself or her apothecary, had felt the most trifling degree of interest in her coughs and catarrhs, her rheumatism and opodeldoc; yet still she was most pertinaciously persuaded of her right to be “indifferent” every autumn; “laid up” all the winter; “convalescent” in the spring; and quite strong—“quite herself” again during the genial brightness of the summer;—to be just as tiresome, in short, and as troublesome, as though she were still enabled to contribute to the pleasures of society, and of a world wherein she had never performed a single disinterested or amiable action!—She persisted in paying long morning visits to persons who would have gladly seen her smothered in her own flannels; and in instituting an endless profusion of idle conversational inquiries, although her determined deafness prevented her from increasing her stock of knowledge by more than one answer in twenty

vouchsafed in return by the mercy of her audience.

In all the intenseness of her selfish stupidity, however, Lady Monteagle cherished a species of consciousness which she believed to be a conscience; and which arose, in fact, from that kind of mental discipline and subordination, ensured by perpetual drilling from the rattan of the world's opinion. And thus, as she had always prudently avoided a recognition of Minnie Wilingham's engagement with Lord Stapylford during the days of his prosperity, she felt herself precluded from positively insisting during his absence upon Miss De Vesci's adherence to her plighted faith: she had, in fact, enlarged too publicly and too positively upon the absurdity of youthful betrothments, and the unfairness of upholding their claims, to put forth any decisive right on the part of her grandson to the hand and unexpected inheritance of the heiress of Bensleigh.

She was not, however, the less sanguine in

her dear Montague's favour ; nor the less eager to ascertain the exact state of Minnie's affairs and of Lord Stapylford's prospects of ultimate success ; and as she found by the unfailing " Not at home " of the new porter in Portman-square that her name had found its way to Lady Maria's list of the excluded, she naturally turned to Miss Willingham—to the gentle Mary, her much-enduring country neighbour—as the only available source of authentic information on the subject. To this end, having deliberately and wheezingly groped her way as high as the Grosvenor-square drawing-room, she anchored her speaking-trumpet at her ear, and commenced her course of cross-examination.

" Well ! my dear Miss Mary !—and so I perceive by the newspapers that your cousin Willinghams are making a great figure in London again ; flirting, and dressing, and dancing away—and all I make no doubt at the expense of poor Miss De Vesci."

" Of *rich* Miss De Vesci," replied Mary,

smiling at her petulance. "But you surely forget that Lady Maria is in possession of a tolerable jointure of her own."

"Every shilling of which, I am persuaded, she lays out in Exchequer Bills ; or perhaps invests in some savings-bank. I will venture my life that Lady Maria Willingham never spent a sovereign of her own, in any instance where she could manage to sponge upon other people's pockets. My dear ! I know her to be a very, *very* interested woman."

"With the exception of a short period, her pecuniary means have always been so limited as to necessitate rigid economy ; and no one, I think, can blame her for making her own interest—which includes that of her daughters—a first, or, at least, a very important consideration."

"But not at the cost of other people ! No, no !—my dear Miss Mary !—believe me there is nothing more contemptible than interested selfishness ! Now, only observe to what general

condemnation she has exposed herself and her daughters, by all the matrimonial speculations they have hazarded during the last twelve years. Not a single young man of rank and fortune has appeared in the world during that period, who has not been besieged by the assiduities of Lady Maria, and by the smiles of the Miss Willinghams."

"Not twelve years—they have not been out more than——but I will not affix a date to their *début*. For my own sake, I choose to consider the birthday of every young and unmarried lady to be like Easter—a moveable feast. But I assure you, dear Lady Monteagle, I am only six-and-twenty myself; and my cousin Claudia is very little my senior."

"By exactly two years and five months!" exclaimed the accurate Dowager, who remembered to a day and an hour the inauspicious births of both. "But time is not always to be measured by years. Claudia and Eleanor came out—as it is called—at fifteen; and have been

racketed about at all the balls and fooleries of all the Courts in Europe, from that day to this. There has been no interval to their dissipation—no peaceful country retirement for their autumnal and winter months; always Bath or Brighton—Spa or Baden—Pyrmont or Plombières—Bagnères or Barrège—Pisa or Abano—as a relief to London, and Paris, and Brussels, and Rome ! They have made the tour of Europe in search of an establishment ; and, at length, with all their wit and beauty they are as little regarded as St. Peter's or St. Paul's—or any other public monument which the whole world has gaped at till it is tired.”

“ Believe me, my cousins are very universally admired ; and considering the favour with which they are received in society, and the manner in which they contribute to its ornament and amusement, it is not wonderful that they should have contracted a taste for mixing in the world.”

“ *A taste !*—an absorbing passion, you mean ! Those girls are never happy, except amid the

blazing of lights and the scraping of fiddles. And even *that* I would forgive, if it proceeded from a girlish love of pleasure; but with them it is all a speculation—all a trade;—ay! and one that will end in bankruptcy, or I am very much mistaken.”

“It is reported that Lord Basingstoke is very much attached to my cousin Claudia.”

“Pho! pho!—I do not believe a word of it. Lord Basingstoke is one of those shy young men who are very much attached to any one who will take the trouble of making love to them;—one of those creepmice who run away with their mother’s waiting-maid, or marry an actress, for want of courage and patience to encounter the formalities of an honourable courtship. But I fancy Basingstoke saw quite enough of the Willinghams in Italy to have made up his mind on the subject long ago, had there been any real fancy on his part towards Miss Claudia;—he was with them, you know, both at Florence and Naples. And, by the way,

my dear Mary, pray tell me what is all this strange history I hear about Lord Lorimer's son being appointed guardian to Miss De Vesci."

"It is no less strange than true. Mr. Lorimer was on the spot, and connected with the family; which probably induced General de Vesci to repose some confidence in——."

"Confidence! why Frederick Lorimer cannot be above three years older than my poor grandson Stapylford?"

"Exactly!—he is a year older than myself."

"I remember when he used to pass half his holidays at Heddeston;—and some people thought he would make a very pretty match for *you*—being your brother's friend, and brought up so much together."

"Persons brought up together," observed Mary mournfully, "very seldom dream of marrying."

"Oh! pardon me, my dear young lady!—Look at your cousin Minnie and Stapylford;—I really think *their* attachment commenced before

they were five years old, and their engagement before the boy had got through his Latin grammar—umph?—what have you to say to that?”

“That they are not yet married,” observed Mary, in a low voice.

“My dear?—”

“I observed that their *marriage* had not yet taken place.”

“Why no!—certainly not;—untoward circumstances, you know—and Montague’s unlucky expedition to India—umph?—To be sure he did it all for the best—all for *her* sake!—umph?—Minnie must have been fully aware that he sacrificed his own eager inclinations to promote the eventual prospects of their union—umph?”

“I never heard my cousin utter one syllable on the subject; but I confess that in *her* place I should have been more flattered by the option of accompanying the man to whom I had been so long formally engaged.”

“All arising from consideration for herself!—

all springing from disinterested regard to Minnie's personal comfort, you may depend upon it, my dear!—and should she ever mention the subject to you, you may assert as much on *my* authority.”

“Miss De Vesci has too good an adviser in her guardian to seek counsel from *me*—and——”

“A guardian of seven and twenty!—So romantic and absurd and indelicate an appointment surely never was heard of!—The only way in which I can account for this strange infatuation on the part of a sensible man like General de Vesci, is by supposing him aware of Mr. Lorimer's intimate friendship with my grandson Stapylford, and with Lord Stapylford's long engagement to his niece—umph?”

Mary smiled, but said nothing.

The Dowager put up her trumpet interrogatively.

“I am as little acquainted with my cousin's matrimonial entanglements, as with General de

Vesci's views ; but if I remember rightly, Mr. Lorimer and Lord Stapylford had subsided into a very moderate degree of friendship previous to his Lordship's departure from England."

"You don't think now—(of course, my dear, I inquire in confidence)—you don't think there is any likelihood of any thing of an attachment between Miss De Vesci and Mr. Lorimer?—Those Lorimers are very artful, manœuvring, successful people ;—witness the way in which Lady Wyndham and Lady Meredyth, without money, or beauty, or talents, contrived to establish themselves ;—and the manner in which Lord Lorimer has crept up in his old age towards the Treasury Bench.—I find that Lady Lorimer, with all her sanctification, leaves no stone unturned to monopolize the young heiress?—Umph?"

"Minnie is extremely fond of Lady Lorimer, who is one of the most estimable women in existence."

"Nonsense—estimable ! what do you sup-

pose one of Lady Maria Willingham's daughters can care for an *estimable* woman?—Umph?"

"Miss De Vesci was not brought up by Lady Maria!" observed Mary proudly.

"Fortunately for herself, and for all who are interested in her good qualities! My dear, I am fully aware of the influence *your* excellent counsels must have upon her young mind—your excellent counsels, Mary, and excellent example: excuse an old woman's praises who has known you from your childhood! But still I think you will allow that Lady Lorimer, in her Merlin's chair, is not exactly the companion to be voluntarily chosen by a young heiress like Miss De Vesci.—Umph?"

"I can only assure you that *I* have no companion of my own age whose society I have ever found more gratifying and more enlivening than that of Lady Lorimer."

"*You* are a reasonable being, and——"

"And so I assure you is my cousin. She is so altered—so grave—so womanly—that I can

scarcely recognise my little wild untameable Heddeston pupil.”

The Dowager was at once puzzled by the announcement of these symptoms, and by what she regarded as Mary Willingham’s unpardonable reserve on all other points of the affair. Fortunately it occurred to her recollection that another country neighbour—Lady Wyndham, the sister of Frederick Lorimer—was probably equally well-informed on the subject, and better inclined to impart her good information; for the fair Gertrude, among those praiseworthy qualifications of the matronly estate which she had acquired since her auspicious hymeneals with the Kentish Baronet, had altogether neglected that of governance of the tongue. Lady Mont-eagle was fully aware that the unruly member of the Lady of Wyndham Park was nearly as ill-regulated as during the days of her ball-flirtations; she therefore hastened from the demure Mary, in the full persuasion of worming Miss De Vesci’s secret out of the sister of her

youthful guardian. A child chasing a rainbow could scarcely have evinced more fruitless and infatuated eagerness in the pursuit, than did the feeble old Dowager in her profitless undertaking.

CHAPTER III.

Now look on Simo's mate ;
No ass so meek—no ass so obstinate.

Pope.

BUT although Miss De Vesci found herself thus cavalierly excluded from the intimacy of her former friend and protector, although Mr. Willingham avoided, with marked reserve, all occasion to seek her confidence, or interest her in his own pursuits, his career was too public and too brilliant to escape her notice and knowledge. If still at times the most sportive and animated creature in existence, in many respects Minnie had “put away childish things.” The uncertainty of her early destiny—the pe-

culiar perplexities attending her entanglement with Lord Stapylford—her painful consciousness of the opinions generally entertained respecting the efforts of her mother and sisters towards achieving a brilliant matrimonial establishment—and above all, the melancholy scene she had recently witnessed at Naples, and its connexion with the counsels of Mr. Lorimer—had tended to sober the buoyancy of her spirits, and to assign the groundwork of her future conduct to solid principle, rather than to those youthful impulses of action by which it had been hitherto influenced.

She was eager, among other duties of more pressing importance, to mark her respect towards the memory of General de Vesci, by consulting the remembrance of his personal prejudices and predilections; and being aware that he cherished a high respect for the Westland family in general, she resolved to overcome her own distaste for their vulgar pomposity, and to comport herself towards them with the friendli-

ness of kindred. At her particular request therefore—for Minnie's requests had now become absolute with her mother—Lady Maria condescended to accompany her to the successive hecatombs offered upon the altars of the wealthy heiress, by every member of the calculating tribe; and thus while her elder sisters were enjoying their little impromptu dinners with the Duchess di Villa Armagnano, or Lady Robert Lorton, Miss De Vesci was enduring the solemnity of some gorgeous display in Cavendish-square, or of some over-acted gastronomic pageant in Portland-place.

At tables such as those of the Westlands, there exists so little of the coterie-intercommunication distinguishing the gossipry of the fashionable world, that the newspaper publicities of operas and plays, exhibitions and executions, levees, and drawing-rooms, and parliamentary debates, generally provision the commissariate department for the war of words. More than one member of the Westland family,

indeed, was seated in that honourable House, whose verbal war is virtually the *property* of the public; and Miss De Vesci—albeit little of a politician, and at present most femininely indifferent to the state of the nation—found herself obliged to swallow her patés and cutlets in daily audience of the recapitulated debates of the preceding night. In these, and throughout all similar discussions, the name of her cousin Charles found honourable mention. His eloquence, his sound logic, the temperate views of his disinterested patriotism, and the surprising influence over the ear of the House already attained by one so young and inexperienced as Mr. Willingham, afforded a constant subject of wonder and admiration to the guests at large, and of sincere interest to her own feelings.

With this excitement to animate the solemn festivals of the Westlands, Miss De Vesci found herself singularly patient and forbearing towards the hordes of vulgar, parading, glistening, rustling, over-dressed Pancrasian dames

who were delighted to display their elaborate finery, and affected ill-breeding, for her edification; and while Lady Maria was mystified beyond description by the difficulty of finding subjects for discourse with personages so totally foreign to all her own sympathies of thought and action, Minnie continued to win upon the general regard of the circle by her unaffected courtesy, and by the readiness with which she seemed or strove to enter into their habits of existence;—into their exaggerated interest in the *début* of every new foreign singer—their intimate version in the politics of the theatres—in the merits of fashionable milliners and personalities of fashionable novels—and in the probable success of an ensuing charity ball at Willis's rooms. She felt indeed that she should have thought better of *them* and of their powers of conversation, if they had not affected to be quite so *fine*—quite so superior, both to their neighbours and to their own condition; and was sometimes tempted to fancy that the lady Duchesses and

Countesses, the chosen friends of her elder sisters, were somewhat less presuming in their demeanour, and infinitely less fastidious in their encounter with the ordinary occurrences of life.—but then their Graces and Ladyships had little to say touching the “meeting of the friends to free trade at Freemason’s Hall,” or the “general views of the City upon the abolition of Colonial Slavery!”

Although sufficiently flattered by the adulation with which, in virtue both of her birth and fortune, she was welcomed among the Ladies Westland and their calculating husbands—the Commissioner—the Director—the Chairman—and the K.C.B.—Minnie became a dupe neither to their flatteries, nor to her own predilections. She was fully aware of the immeasurable gulf fixed between the upstart tribe and such persons as Lady Cosmo Somerset or Mary Willingham, in refinement of mind and manners, and in that unpretending simplicity which forms the noblest polish of high-breeding; and nothing amused her more than to

return home from the pompous festivals of these flies upon the wheel of society, and find her sisters overflowing with details of their own set—with scandal from Alnacks, and malicious wit from White's—and intimately persuaded, in their turn, of the utter inutility of any race of human beings living in exclusion from those holy tabernacles of fashionable sanctity.

It was upon the conclusion of one of Sir Robert Westland's most sumptuous and most prosy dinner-parties, that Miss De Vesci, on her return to Portman-square, exhausted by the sickening baseness of the homage she had received on all sides, found Claudia and Eleanor installed in her dressing-room in their gayest and most communicative mood; and eager to relate the events of an evening which had introduced them, for the first time, to the society of the young Duchess of Lisborough.

Under the protection of their friend Lady Robert, they had been enjoying the polished but inane elegance of Lady Cosmo Somerset's boudoir circle; nothing had been done for

their amusement;—no dancing—no music—no cards—had broken in upon the delicious do-nothingness of the little coterie; yet they had felt themselves fully entertained, and not one moment of *ennui* had endangered their spell of pleasure. They had been mingling with persons whom they exactly suited, and who were exactly suited to themselves: persons whose whole business was pleasure; whose whole pleasure was a selfish enjoyment of the luxuries of life; whose abstract idea of moral excellence consisted in the good breeding which keeps all selfishness out of view, and consequently out of the danger of collision with that of others; persons, in short, acknowledging no law but that of good breeding—no object in life but an easy, and agreeable, and rapid annihilation of their superfluous time.

The marriage of Lord and Lady Cosmo had immediately succeeded the departure of the Willinghams and the Ebury fête; his Lordship having speedily turned from his flirtation to his

allegiance to the young and lovely Barbara; who, on her part, was very ready to believe in his professions that his indiscreet connexion with Mrs. Grandison had been a mere boyish freak—tending only to increase the ardour of his purer affections, and to disgust him at once and for ever with the artifices of coquetry, and the briery roses of unhallowed love. Lord and Lady Desmond had also been persuaded, though not without difficulty, to bestow the hand of their darling daughter upon a suitor whose handsome person and countenance boded many a peril to the peace of her future fireside; but who, as a younger brother, was scantily supplied with the means of endowing her home with any other than tranquil domestic pleasures. Lord Cosmo, however, was too well connected to languish long in poverty or obscurity: the crumbs which fall from ministerial tables form the natural subsistence of all dogs of notable pedigree; and as long as Secretaries are wanted merely to sign their honourable names in endorsement of official

returns, it is just as creditable and useful to the country at large, that those names should be Howard, Percy, Russell, or Seymour—as Thompson, Johnson, Brown, or Smith.

Lord and Lady Cosmo were accordingly very easily provided for; without any extraordinary diminution of the national revenue, or any inconvenient liberality on the part of the houses of Desmond or Somerset. Lord Cosmo's "ayes" and "noes" were understood to be at the immediate service of His Majesty's Ministers, at whose instigation the independent burgesses of the borough he represented in parliament, had honoured him with their distinguished preference; while Lady Cosmo was enabled to pay her bills at Maradan's, and retain her equipage and opera-box, without taxing the splendid poverty of her own illustrious parents. Her husband's official avocations chained her somewhat closely to the routine of a London life; but it was a life she knew how to enjoy and to embellish. Her house, although offering no competition with

the brilliant fêtes of more opulent triflers, was the rendezvous of all the best society; while her popularity remained unrivalled both with her own sex, and with the one whose admiration forms a far more dangerous distinction. She was, in fact, so much beloved and so much courted by that class which adores the sight of whatever is young, and beautiful, and prosperous, that the envious had already begun to anticipate misfortune for a person whose destiny had been hitherto all sunshine; and the malicious to predict some evil result from all the idolatry lavished upon her loveliness. At present, however, the cloud remained remote and invisible; nor had the breath of calumny yet dared to sully the "virgin page" of her spotless life.

Lady Cosmo was eager among those who had joyfully welcomed the return of Eleanor and Claudia Willingham to their former circle; and having in some degree shared the anxieties and vicissitudes of their earlier career of matrimo-

nial ambition, she was curious to observe the first meeting between Claudia and the Duke of Lisborough; and to learn the opinions of the lively Eleanor touching the demure little Duchess, her sister's successful rival.

"Do you expect the Lisboroughs to-night, Barbara?" Lady Robert Lorton had inquired, on entering the room with her young friends.

"I *did* expect them," replied Lady Cosmo, laughing as she spoke; "for the Duke assured me last night at the Opera, that they would look in on their return from some royal dinner to which they were engaged. But he rode after me this morning in the Park, in the most vehement hurry and agitation, to make his excuses."

"And why?"

"Between his own nervous incoherence, and the noise of the carriages passing at the time, I found it difficult to ascertain the terms of the apology; but I suspect Anastasia had discovered that the Willinghams were arrived, and were likely to be of the party; and that she

would neither come herself nor give him leave of absence."

"How absurd !—or perhaps the Duchess considered Lisborough's visit to your box last night too prolonged and too amusing. I was sitting with her, and observed that she never moved her glass from your face during the whole time."

"But her glass gave her no insight into the subject of our conversation ?"

"Pardon me !—she saw that the Duke was laughing heartily at all your lively sallies—an exertion—poor fellow !—which he seldom hazards in her immediate presence. And, by the way, she made me the *souffre douleur* for all your sins and his ; and grew so silently sullen, that if Wolryche had not brought some of his bad puns into the box, I should have expired of the bores before the close of the ballet."

"POOR FELLOW !! the Duke of Lisborough !" reiterated Eleanor Willingham, overcome with surprise and curiosity. "Can you possibly

mean that Duke Absolute the first has degenerated into a hen-pecked husband ?"—

"And hen-pecked by such a dove as Lady Anastasia !" said Claudia.

"Why you seem to have heard nothing of the Lisborough House politics !" resumed Lady Cosmo, greatly amused. "You appear ignorant that the Temple of the Graces has become a mere Petticoat-Government House ;—that Lisborough dare not order his poodle shaved without leave ; and as to invitations—I question whether he retains the privilege of offering a corner of his table to his chaplain."

"As to Robert and myself, for his life's worth he dare not ask us to dinner without a previous family consultation," added Lady Robert Lorton.

"And by what tact or talent, has the Duchess attained this miraculous degree of influence over so positive a man ?" inquired Eleanor, still more and more amazed.

"Talent !—she is as dull as a November

fog!—But having just discrimination enough to forewarn her that he *was* positive, she met him in their very first struggle for supremacy incased in such a buff-coat of sullen obstinacy, that he found it impervious to all ordinary weapons. The little Duchess had also the wisdom to enrol herself in Charlotte Grayfield's sect—the clan of the All-Excellents;—and with the assistance of her demure demeanour, and apathetic silence in society—a sort of selfish deference towards the opinions and interests of her own family, and a callous firmness in all her dealings with her husband—she passes for a prodigy of virtue and understanding. You will hear her quoted as the most prudent, sensible, amiable, unassuming woman in existence;—you will find her stupid, and unamiable and uncompanionable.”

“You astonish me beyond description!” exclaimed Claudia Willingham. “Possessed of every gift and every blessing to embellish and endear existence, how is it possible that the

Duchess of Lisborough can retain this sort of sullen indifference ? ”

“ In the first place, she is afflicted with a jealous and ungracious temper ; in the next, she knew herself to be indebted to accident and artifice rather than to Lisborough’s preference, for the honour of his hand ; and instead of attempting to acquire the qualifications likely to conquer his affections, she resolved to maintain her conjugal influence by a far less pleasing method. Then she has been disappointed in her hopes of giving an heir to the House of Lorton, and the very sight of Lady Robert’s son is wormwood to her ; and above all, she is peevishly conscious of her own want of attractions, and is as ill-temperedly jealous of the Duke, as if he were handsome or agreeable, or endowed with any other merits than those of his rank and fortune—which are of course available only to herself.”

“ Nay ! now you are too hard upon poor Lisborough ! ” interrupted Lady Robert. “ He has

more good taste and good feeling than half the men one meets in society; and since he has been so thoroughly subdued and overcrowded, I have found him infinitely more agreeable than in the rampant days of his high-mightiness. But my dear Lady Cosmo!—what have you been dreaming about?—There they are;—positively *there* are the Lisboroughs seated on the sofa in the inner room. Look through the folding-doors!”

Lady Cosmo, raising her glass in the direction pointed out, and perceiving that Lady Robert Lorton’s assertion was perfectly correct, hastened to pay her compliments to her unexpected guests. While she was occupied in receiving the formal explanation of the Duchess of Lisborough, Lady Robert whispered to Eleanor, who was still completely mystified by the whole scene, “Now would I venture my life that Anastasia has been tormenting the Duke out of his very patience by her affected irresolution about this very party, for the last two days. One

of the artifices through which she increases the importance of her conscious nonentityism, is by rendering all the minor incidents and trifles of life a matter of endless discussion ; and as she is wholly incapable of any action of importance, she thinks it right to make it appear of consequence whether she uses her chariot or her brouche—her gray horses or her brown. Thus she perplexes Lisborough to death by pretended uncertainties, when she has as obstinately grounded her purpose as the Eddystone beacon ; and I am satisfied that at the very moment she despatched him yesterday with her excuses to Barbara, she had predetermined to come here, for the purpose of mortifying Claudia by the spectacle of all her diamonds.”

“I concluded that the Royal dinner was the motive of her unusual brilliancy.”

“I remember last year there was a fête given by the Duke of Shropshire to the Margrave of Baden, at which Lisborough was anxious she should appear in her utmost *éclat*.”

“ A distinction which feminine vanity rarely rejects.”

“ Anastasia’s vanity, however, is light as air, compared with her love of supremacy. It was exactly an instance to prove that she had a will of her own, and that she would maintain it; so, assuming her meekest air of sullen humility, she did honour to his Royal Highness’s invitation by a muslin dress without the foreign aid of one single ornament;—thanking Heaven all the while that she was guiltless of the sin of worldly pride!”

“ Tormenting creature! And is the Duke submissive under all this capricious arrogance?”

“ Fairly hectored into the tamest domesticity! And the worst of it is, he is fully aware that no one pities him;—his own former assumptions having predisposed the world to glory in seeing him thus fairly matched. Claudia, for instance, cannot fail to exult in the degradation of his conjugal destinies.”

Eleanor had soon ample means of personally authenticating the exactness of Lady Robert’s

and Lady Cosmo's representations, by observing the embarrassment of the Duke of Lisbrough's address, in his interview with Claudia. It was sufficiently evident that the annoyance and apprehension betrayed in his demeanour, was derived less from his remembrance of former scenes, than from his certainty that the Duchess was spitefully watching his every word and every movement; and still more, from his doubt as to the line of conduct she would herself pursue on so delicate an occasion.

Her Grace had, however, taken her own resolution; and, as usual, pretty determinately.—She chose to be a victim!—a poor, meek, persecuted wife, driven by the tyranny of a despotic lord to offer her abject homage to the former, and perhaps the true object of his secret affections! Approaching Eleanor and Claudia, with the humblest deference, she proceeded to overwhelm them with gracious courtesies and most perplexing condescension. She appeared to wait their orders to be seated;—their per-

mission to smile ;—their sanction to assume her accustomed place by the side of the Duke of Lisborough ;—who, with the most painful embarrassment, stood waiting the issue of the pantomime ; neither daring to defeat her folly by irony, nor to terminate the exposure of all parties, by an open exertion of authority. Eleanor was already out of all patience with his forbearance ; but Claudia could only bestow her sincere commiseration upon the self-sought humiliation of her former lover. She even good-naturedly attempted to modify his manifest distress, by supplying some indifferent subject for general discussion.

“ We have been so long strangers in England, that we find our little knot of friends sadly dispersed. Time and absence—death and marriage, have left us very few familiar faces to greet our return.”

“ Miss Willingham shows her admirable knowledge of the world by such a classification,” answered the Duchess, with the patient

smile of a martyr. "Death and marriage!—Yes! You are quite right in reminding your friends that these terms are synonymous."

"When we left London five years ago," continued Claudia, without noticing her spiteful interruption, "Lady Robert appeared to entertain a hope that the Duke and yourself might be persuaded to join her on the Continent; and during our residence abroad, we were constantly in expectation that you would verify her prediction."

"Lady Robert had doubtless consulted the Duke of Lisborough's known taste by such an arrangement; and it was probably very selfish on my part to interpose some little consideration towards my personal feelings. But I am a poor simple creature—born and bred in England—affecting none of those high-wrought sensibilities which require the excitements of foreign refinement, and luxury, and novelty. I am so old-fashioned as to love my own country, my own home, my own family; and I plead guilty

to having been the means of discountenancing my sister Lady Robert's obliging plans."

It was but too true that the girlish, unassuming, devoted bride, selected by the despotic Duke of Lisborough, had resolutely negatived the very first project of his married life—and had thus defeated the most important objection of the rash connexion, by peremptorily declining even a temporary residence on the Continent; and she now recorded her original triumph with so malicious a sneer, that Lisborough was in agonies lest she should meditate some further exhibition of her omniscience. He even welcomed the accession of Sir George Wolryche and Mulgrave to their little group, with a degree of grateful cordiality which he had never thought to bestow upon persons of such equivocal importance in the fashionable world. But even their opportune arrival served, alas! only to display the ill-natured absurdity of his wife in a new light; for upon Wolryche's presuming to recount some trifling *on dit* of fashionable scan-

dal, perfectly adapted to ears both polite and feminine, she thought it her duty, as Lady Grayfield's pupil, and a severe stickler for minor proprieties, to appear shocked; and to desert a circle thus disgracefully abandoned to modern indelicacy of word and deed.

Now, in repeating the minutiae of the whole scene for Minnie's edification, Eleanor Willingham contrived to lighten its details by such exquisite mimicry of the Duke's fussy and tremulous embarrassment, of the Duchess's sanctified demureness of voice and feature—scarcely serving to mask the real malice of her intentions—and of Lady Robert Lorton's polite attempts to disguise her alternate impulses of amusement and disgust, that Miss De Vesci could not but join heartily in their laugh at the expense of Claudia's fickle adorer. From the general hints she had recently gathered of the Duke of Lisborough's former conduct towards her sister, she was perfectly satisfied to find that his importance in the world of fashion had been re-

duced by his marriage to its true level; that he was still personally estimated as one of the most distinguished and respectable of British noblemen; but that his rule as the unimpeachable autocrat of the western world of London was no longer recognised by its adoring multitude.

“I have no doubt,” observed Minnie listlessly to her sisters, “that he will now become a very agreeable personage. Every one used to assert that the charm of his elegant mind and manners was only defeated by that giddiness of brain which must afflict all idols nourished upon incense; and now that his Grace is permitted to walk the earth instead of being elevated on the shoulders of his worshippers, his step will become more firm and self-possessed.”

“I trust you will soon judge for yourself,” observed Eleanor. “The Duchess made a thousand courteous inquiries after you, and invitations to us all; and when you really make up your mind to appear in society, you can-

not begin better, Minnie, than by Lisborough House; which although no longer what it was—The Temple of the Fairies—of course continues to unite the most select society of London.”

“Thank you—thank you!—but I have no immediate intention of taking my first rash step in the mighty maze. Next season will be quite time enough for me to mingle in your pleasures.”

“We have half promised to drive down to Ebury some morning with Lady Robert Lorton; and the Duchess has undertaken to make up a little impromptu party for us there, as soon as the lilacs and laburnums have put on their ball-dresses.”

“*Ebury!*” exclaimed Miss De Vesci, starting and colouring. “What have all those people to do with dear Ebury?”

“Lord Stapylford had it, you know, only on lease; and at the time of—of——”

“At the time of his *ruin*, it fell into the hands

of his creditors, or of the owner!" pursued Minnie, with perfect composure.

" Exactly."

" But surely it never was the Duke of Lisborough's property?"

" Never!—nor is it now.—But the perverse Anastasia finding him possessed of the most beautiful *bijou* of a villa ever imagined or perfected by mortal taste, immediately decided that the damp air from the river was prejudicial to her health; and that nothing would suit her fancy or her constitution but Ebury, where there is a stagnant lake."

" And which she therefore compelled him to purchase."

" Not precisely; for it is the unattainable property of some minor—locked up in that House of Correction—the Court of Chancery. She obliged him however to hire it for her; for, like other humble, simple, unpretending martyrs of her caste, she half ruins him by the expensive gratification of all her childish whims."

“Dear Ebury!” observed Miss De Vesci, in a fit of profound musing. “To think that five years—five irrecallable years have expired since the day of that delightful fête!—To think how circumstances, and persons, and feelings have altered since that happy day!”

Her sisters looked significantly at each other; believing her reminiscent thoughts to be occupied with Lord Stapylford, of whose claims upon her tenderness both were extremely impatient.

“If you will not think me too capricious,” pursued Minnie, with a guilty blush, “pray get me included in Lady Robert’s and the Duchess’s invitation. I have not altered my intentions already with regard to the ‘mighty maze;’ I shall not interfere with your balls—your Almack’s—your opera—my dear sisters!—But I own that few things would give me so much gratification as to visit Ebury again! Young as I am, I find myself compelled to be a votary of ‘The Pleasures of Memory!’”

CHAPTER IV.

The town has tinged the country ; and the stain
Appears a spot upon a vestal's robe,
The worse for what it soils. The fashions run
Down into scenes still rural, but, alas !
Scenes rarely graced with rural manners now.

Cowper.

LADY MARIA WILLINGHAM's maternal position relative to Miss De Vesci was one of extreme embarrassment and perplexity. From Minnie's early childhood, almost from the moment of her birth, her Ladyship had so determinately shaken off that tenderest of ties which unites a mother to her child—a child to her parent,—that with all her tact, and all her wilfulness, she could hit upon no argument and no

pretext by which to sanction the reassumption of her lawful authority. She found herself debarred from all share or participation in the execution of General De Vesci's will; and she knew that her former demeanour towards both the Westland family and Mr. Lorimer, had predetermined the trustees of the young heiress to resist her very first attempt at interference. The worst grievance of all, to a woman of so vile a temper, was that her total want of power forbade her to avenge herself upon the innocent object of her displeasure; and that while she dared not tyrannize over the child on whom depended so much of the comfort and respectability of her future days, she could not so much as find a pretext for discontent in Miss D Vesci's deportment towards herself.

Respectful and gentle in her bearing towards her ungracious parent, Minnie was far better disposed than either of her sisters to tolerate Lady Maria's fits of ill-humour, and to sympathize with that lassitude and those growing

infirmities, which the decline of life so lavishly apports to the martyrs of habitual dissipation. Her own lively and playful disposition, although considerably subdued by circumstances, enabled her to parry and divert those selfish repinings of the decaying woman of fashion, arising from shattered nerves and disappointed expectations. She saw that Lady Maria was harassed with an eager curiosity to pry into the secrets of her heart, and bring to light and publicity the true state of her feelings and engagements; but on this head—being well aware that the dictates of motherly tenderness would have little share in suggesting either her inquiries or her counsels—Minnie continued to maintain a scrupulous and dexterous reserve. Both Lady Maria Willingham, therefore, and her elder daughters, were perforce compelled to await the period of Mr. Lorimer's arrival in England for a final elucidation of their doubts and difficulties touching the future intention of his ward.

The first object with all parties was the matrimonial settlement of Claudia and Eleanor during the interim ; a purpose in the fulfilment of which they were no less sanguine than resolute ; for Lord Basingstoke continued to accept their advances with very encouraging graciousness ; and Eleanor, in the deficiency of higher game, had commenced a vehement flirtation with Sir Comyne Wallace, who for many years had been secretly and unwillingly captivated by her attractions. In spite of being what is termed “ a man about town,” Sir Comyne was endowed with much good sense, and some good principles ; and although a poor Baronet, and generally stigmatized as a detrimental, and unequal to the expenses of a fashionable establishment, he was known to have a clear two thousand a-year at his disposal ;—a settlement sufficiently tempting to a girl in the decline of her beauty, and under the stigma of a general recognition of having failed in her more ambitious speculations. To become Lady Wallace,

and independent of Lady Maria's peevishness, was a forlorn hope not to be neglected !

It was with these views to stimulate their measures, that the little party to Ebury was eagerly prompted by the Miss Willinghams. The Duchess of Lisborough, amiably anxious to convince them of the joys of that destiny which she had wrenched from their attainment, and to mark in the decision of her arrangements her despotic maintenance of her matrimonial rights, lent herself very readily to the plan ; and Eleanor and Claudia, having taken their friend Lady Robert into their private councils, were fortunate in securing an invitation for their sister, and the attendance of Lord Basingstoke and of Sir Comyne for themselves.

“ Excepting Barbara Somerset,” observed Lady Robert Lorton, as they were arranging the preliminaries of arrival and departure on the previous day, “ I cannot promise you any very agreeable female accessions to the party. Lady Grayfield and the Duchess together, have con-

trived to filter their acquaintance to so marvellous a degree of moral purity, that their circle is as insipid as it is cold. That they should exclude such personages as Lady Wroxton and other decidedly mischievous members, I can heartily sanction. But there is Lady Rachel Verney, the most agreeable woman in London—modest and elegant and of singular propriety of demeanour—an old friend of the Duke's, and placed by her fifty years beyond all possible reach of future scandal;—”

“And what can their prudery find to urge against her?”

“That Lord Grandville has dined with her husband several times a-week for the last five-and-twenty years; and that so very prolonged an intimacy with a stupid man like Mr. Verney argues undue attraction on the part of his wife!”

“What an invidious decision! The attraction is just as likely to be on the side of his French cock, or his excellent cellar of wines.”

“Lord Grandville in point of fact suits the Verneys, and they suit him ; they know the same people and entertain the same opinions on most points ; it is the mere force of habit which binds them so closely together.”

“Do you remember that when some courtier complimented Madame de Pompadour on the constancy of Louis XV. she gave exactly the same explanation ?—‘Were my apartments at Versailles to be changed so as to compel his Majesty to ascend a different staircase in order to visit me,’ said the Sultana of the King, ‘the routine of his life would be discomposed, and he would probably desert me !’”

“Rely upon it then, that were Mr. Verney to sell his house in Chesterfield-street, or to dismiss Lagrange, there would be an end of the friendship which so deeply scandalizes poor Charlotte and Anastasia !—Nevertheless, I should scarcely recommend Lady Rachel to attempt the sacrifice for their sakes ; for she would obtain neither thanks nor compensation ; their

solemn tribe of the All-Excellents is the most boring set in London.”

“But surely it is rather an impertinent piece of presumption on their part to attempt the regulation of the households and private affairs of other people.”

“Oh ! that is a Lorton mania ! and the fault has not been amended by a connexion with the Burgoyne family ; who are vehement reformers, and feel themselves required, by a sort of inherent and hereditary purity, to enlighten all the Gentiles and sinners of the earth. Leaving Christian humility—the most beautiful and holy of virtues—entirely out of the question, they annihilate you with the sum total of their annual subscriptions to public charities ; with the number of sermons they have heard and read in the course of the year ; with the missionary societies whose meetings they have attended ; and with the downfall of the multitudes of frail mortals they have discountenanced and driven from society.”

“In short they seem to ‘make broad their

phylacteries,' and to neglect the sweet impulses of true charity."

"Exactly!—there *is* an instance—but I will not discuss the subject—it makes me too angry!—and for the sake of family peace I am willing to keep on good terms both with Charlotte Grayfield and her very promising catechumen."

On the following day, however, the "instance" alluded to by Lady Robert, forced itself more immediately on the attention of all parties; and Eleanor, who was something of an enthusiast, found leisure between the pauses of her flirtation with Sir Comyne to join in the utmost indignation of her friend.

Fortunately for the sentimental reminiscences of Miss De Vesci, the season of the year precluded a very intimate comparison between Lord Stapylford's Ebury, and that of the Duchess of Lisborough. The former celebrated fête—the "Feast of Roses" as it had been called in its day of triumph—had occurred in July; when nature is beginning to languish under the fer-

vours of continued sunshine. At present they had only reached the middle of May ; and the cool green shrubberies were still brightened by the golden streams of the laburnums, with intermingling clusters of lilacs and gueldres-roses, cystuses and rhododendrons. The frail shoots of many of the later trees and shrubs, were still pale with their tender varieties of verdure ; and the fresh and promising smile of springtide was yet untinged by the luxurious and luxuriant ripeness of summer. The meadows, too, presented that varied tapestry of exclusively English growth, which enamels their level verdure with a thousand idle but exquisite weeds,—with countless varieties of every bright reflex of the rainbow ; showing like the blossomed haunts of fairyland, and overshadowed by spiral clusters of chestnut-bloom, by the quivering lime-trees, and by the bright blue sky, smiling in joyful lustre above them all.

And Minnie in gazing around her as they crossed the laughing Thames, and penetrated

the bowery avenues of Roehampton, felt her heart oppressed by the glorious refulgence of the scene and of the hour. Her mind was undistracted by schemes for the captivation of the heroes on horseback, who ever and anon passed and repassed her barouche; bending over its burnished panels for the interchange of a whisper with Claudia and Eleanor, or of a word or two of polite ceremony with poor Lady Maria and her rheumatism. She was careless even of the attractions of her own new bonnet; although it was in truth an exquisite realization of one of Claudia's daintiest imaginings, and from the hands of Maradan herself, Minnie found leisure beneath its friendly shade to sacrifice an unseen and silent tear;—either in tribute to the beneficent gifts of nature distributed on every side around her, or to those secret recollections prompted by the well-remembered scenery which they served to adorn. The lodge-gates of Ebury Park, while they quickened the pulsations of her heart to an almost

painful pitch of agitation, now reminded her that it was time to control those feelings for the investigation of the critical eyes she was about to encounter.

But although the Duchess of Lisborough evidently intended to be as gracious as her dull and undemonstrative nature would permit, the Willinghams, long accustomed to the cordial greetings of the Continent, would have been somewhat chilled by her Grace's manner of reception, had it not been neutralized by the smiling friendship of Lady Robert; who had preceded them, and who was seated on the beautiful lawn in expectation of their arrival. *Her* greeting, however, was incautiously framed with regard to the sensibilities of *one* member of the little group; she was not yet sufficiently acquainted with Miss De Vesci, or sufficiently aware of the gentle delicacy of her feelings, to consider either her or them as an object of deference. To Lady Robert she was at present only a pretty little girl—the rich heiress of Bensleigh

Park ;—she had yet to learn that Minnie was one of the most disinterested, amiable, and fascinating little beings in the world !

“ Who would have thought,” she incautiously exclaimed, extending a hand to either of the Willinghams, “ who would have thought that we three should meet again in these gardens of Armida—and neither ‘ in thunder, lightning, or in rain,’—but under the influence of the same love of pleasure, and the charm of the same glorious summer sunshine !—Laud we the Gods ! meanwhile, who have left us for five mortal years in the enjoyment of these same buoyant impulses of existence ; while so many of our co-mates and companions of the Ebury fête have been wrecked and stranded on barren shores ;—so many removed from our sight by death and disaster.”

“ You greet us right morally this morning,” replied Eleanor, blushing deeply ; for she had been fully conscious of her sister’s depression of spirits during their drive. ‘ You should have

reserved that knotty sentence for our departure—it would have better graced *l'envoy* of our day of pleasure.”

“A lady’s arrangement!” interrupted Sir Comyne Wallace. “Ever postponing the moral to the last bitter moment! even as the salutary dregs of the cup of health are allowed to fall to the bottom.”

“Remember it is yourself only, who have defined physic and moral reflections as synonymous potions,” said Eleanor, laughing.

“We will throw both to the dogs just now,” interrupted Lady Robert Lorton. “Barbara Somerset has been waiting for us these ten minutes to make the tour of the American garden, while the Duchess performs her etiquette duties of reception. The Duke is stationed with Lady Cosmo, and impatient to be gone; or his little tour will be intercepted altogether by his lynx-eyed guardian.”

“And who are those two foreigners with Lord Cosmo Somerset?”

“The young Duke of Saxe-Altenburg and his bear-leader Monsieur de Béthizy.”

“I should not have thought the Duchess of Lisborough would tolerate any thing ultra-marine. She talked to us the other night as if the Straits of Dover were the only moral palladium of England ; and hinted that nothing less than quarantine was satisfactory to her feelings after the infection of Paris.”

“Why as to Béthizy, I dare say she wishes him fairly at the bottom of the lake yonder ; but Lord Cosmo, who is tolerably high in the Foreign Office, and obliged to do the courteous and hospitable to these wandering High Migh-tinesses, has contrived to reconcile both Charlotte Grayfield and the Duchess to this Saxon *Durchlaucht*.”

“By what sage argument, or justifiable imposture ?”

“By neither ;—the simple fact that Melancthon was born in His Highness’s dominions—was originally sanctified by the protection of

His Highness's ancestors—and that he finally bequeathed some kind of tattered vest and cassock as a controversial trophy to their posterity, sufficed to captivate their interest in the Duke of Saxe Altenburg's favour. They have oppressed him with civilities ever since Somerset revealed this orthodox and interesting coincidence; and the poor little Duke, whose head is full of the Mazurka, and whose heart is said to be equally occupied with the new *prima donna*, is completely mystified by their incessant recurrence to Melancthon's legacy, and to his own good fortune in reigning over a branch of the elect."

They had now reached the beautiful spot—a group of larches overhanging a fountain which seemed to spring from a natural rock overspread with creeping plants—where the Duke of Lisborough and Lady Cosmo were waiting their arrival. Lisborough appeared to welcome his presentation to Miss De Vesci, whom he had hitherto overlooked as a mere child, in order to escape the embarrassing consciousness of receiving

Claudia Willingham for the first time under his matrimonial roof; but Lady Robert heard, or fancied that she heard, a very regretful sigh burst from His Grace's lips as he gazed upon her still lovely face, and listened to the graceful courtesies with which she replied to the compliments of Lord Basingstoke, on whose arm she hung. Lady Robert, for the more intimate satisfaction of her curiosity on the subject, accepted that of the Duke; Sir Comyne took charge of Eleanor and Minnie, and the little party proceeded gaily on its projected expedition.

It was a beautiful day; the Ebury gardens were bright with innumerable varieties of flowers, both exotic and of familiar growth. The blossomed thickets seemed bursting with the redundant song of their feathered population; and the fountains chimed melodiously in many a shadowy nook. Here, an ornate terrace, graced with marble statues, half hidden by surrounding shrubs, presented a miniature resemblance of

the stately bowers of Louis Le Grand ; and further on, some leafy desert abandoned to the wild shagginess of untrimmed nature, formed a beautiful contrast with the decorated tone of the preceding scenery. Those who had been long absent from the spot, were careful to note with admiring graciousness the wonderful improvements wrought in every department by the tasteful interposition of the Duchess ; but while her guests were thus carefully and unnecessarily courteous towards the absent Dryad of the scene, her Grace was by no means equally amiably-disposed towards themselves. Some idler of the party having marked the auspicious outset of their journey of discovery, and noticed it to the Duchess by way of a piece of intelligence highly gratifying to her hospitable feelings, she could not for a moment resist the gratification of disorganizing a harmless project calculated to advance the happiness of half a dozen unoffending persons, without previous reference to her own intentions. She had no

idea of allowing her husband and his friends to be amused, without a direct reference to her will!—

Scarcely, therefore, had they penetrated a quarter of a mile of the shrubbery, towards the margin of the lake, when a panting page, heated and out of breath, was despatched to overtake the Duke, with a message of request for his immediate return. “The Duchess’s love, and she trusted he would lend her his assistance in entertaining the Duke of Saxe-Altenburg.” The whole party—however vexed in secret by this inopportune interruption, immediately volunteered to accompany his return to the house. But of this the Duke of Lisborough would not hear.

“No—no! let me beg of you to proceed!—Lady Robert will form a far more experienced Cicerone than myself,” said he, stealing a deprecating glance at his fair sister-in-law, whom he suspected would profit by his departure to put the case, and his own humiliating

conjugal position, in their true light. "The fact is, that poor dear Anastasia is so extremely timid"—he tried to direct this observation more particularly to the Willingham party—"that she cannot bear to be left with strangers. Let me entreat you to excuse both her and myself; and to pursue your original intentions."

Minnie was delighted to find that Lady Cosmo and the rest were acquiescent with this proposal of the Duke's; and as he slowly retraced his steps towards the villa, she cared very little for the burst of surprise and contemptuous commiseration which marked his departure. She cared very little for Claudia's astonished sympathy, or Lady Robert's indignant comments;—for they had reached the borders of the lake!—They were actually standing close to that well-remembered spot where Stapylford had rescued her from its waters, five years before; and where Charles Willingham had breathed his displeasure at her rash adventure, in terms of familiar and affectionate reproof,

now, alas ! no longer addressed to the heiress of Bensleigh !

It was a beautiful scene !—The woods diversified with their countless variety of early foliage were feathered down towards the lake, whose margin was in some places fringed with thickets of gorse and broom—now sheeted with blossoms—in order to afford shelter to the water-fowl. At intervals these brooding solitaires might be heard wailing among the rushes ; while here and there a majestic swan led forth its callow train of cygnets as if proud of her premature maternity. Clustered round the tiny islands dotted over the waves, floated the broad and glossy leaves of the water-lilies, appearing to support the opening glory of their crisp and snowy blossoms.—It was a beautiful scene !

Apparently the whole party became severally and profoundly conscious of its magic charm ; for insensibly the little group divided into scattered sections, and “ *chacun y chercha sa cha-*

cune !” Lord Basingstoke withdrew the willing Claudia beneath a screen of quivering beech-trees, and persuaded her to seat herself beside him on the short smooth herbage round their shaft-like stems ; Eleanor and Sir Comyne amused themselves by searching among the flowery reeds for the nests of the wild-fowl ; Lady Robert and Lady Cosmo Somerset, who were engaged in a most vehement discussion of the Duchess of Lisborough’s jealousy and absurd impertinence, unconsciously and by degrees strolled off in another direction ; and Minnie found herself at length in the very position she could have desired—

Alone—upon the solitary shore !

For a beautiful girl of eighteen to be alone—and alone and meditative in a beautiful spot—is to say in other terms that Love is the subject of her reverie ! Miss De Vesci’s thoughts were probably of the same tender and gentle character with those which would have waited, under

similar circumstances, on any other of her sex; and to judge from the expression of her lovely countenance, they were no less sad than sweet. But it would have been a matter of extreme difficulty, even to those most intimately acquainted with the position of her affairs, to attribute their sadness, and sweetness, and tenderness, to their true and several sources. It might be the recollection of Lord Stapylford and his village of **Mortonsdorf** which he had abandoned and scorned for her sake on that very spot five years before;—it might be “Gaietà and the bending of the shore there,” with its Neapolitan associations of her youthful guardian—of the absent Frederick;—it might be the recollected alienation of Charles Willingham, the friend and playmate of her youth, which so grievously oppressed her spirits, and brought unbidden tears into her eyes!—Whatever the exciting cause, the effect was positive—that the young and beautiful heiress, as she stood beside the glassy waves, felt herself the

most lonely and desolate being that ever gazed upon the reflection of Nature in her mirror of solitude !

As Miss De Vesci stood musing with fixed and mournful steadfastness upon the unruffled surface of the lake, some chain of sentimental association brought to her recollection that remarkable scene in the romance of Madame de Stael, where the features of Lord Nelvil are revealed to Corinne by moonlight in the waters of the fountain of Trevi at Rome. She started ! for as the visionary image touched her mind, she saw distinctly on the water before her the shadows of two approaching figures, and she smiled consciously through her tears as the involuntary words burst from her lips—"Alas ! *my* Oswald is far enough from Ebury Park !"

In another moment she perceived that one of the intruders wore the thin, lank, ungainly figure of Lord Robert Lorton ; but again she started, and more eagerly than before, when in his companion she discerned one at least of the

three absent objects of her regret—her cousin Mr. Willingham. During the slow approach of these gentlemen, she prepared to welcome their unexpected appearance with ceremonious politeness; yet she could not refrain from whispering to herself, in pursuance with the visionary train of images she had previously conjured up—“the hero of the fountain appears!—but rightly indeed did I conjecture that its waters would serve to reflect no lover of mine!”

CHAPTER V.

Ce n'est pas le premier amour qui est ineffaçable, il vient du besoin d'aimer ; mais lorsqu' après avoir connu la vie on rencontre l'esprit et l'ame que l'on avoit vainement cherchés, l'imagination est subjuguée par la vérité.

De Stael.

LORD ROBERT LORTON, according to his ordinary colloquial custom, was diffuse and tedious beyond measure in the expression of his surprise at finding Miss De Vesci so unceremoniously abandoned to her own devices.

“ He sincerely trusted,” he said, “ that Lady Robert had not been wanting in attention to any of the Duke of Lisborough’s guests ;”—and was only prevented from going in im-

mediate search after his wife, with a view to further inquiry and reprimand, by his anxiety that Minnie should become minutely acquainted with all the causes of his very late appearance at Ebury—of his finding out so exactly the place of her retreat—of his having prevailed upon his young friend Mr. Willingham (whom he had met at Brookes's) to accompany him to a little party which indeed he might almost term a family party—of all and every thing in short which he had done, or thought, or felt, or imagined for the last four-and-twenty hours !

Before he had arrived at the concluding term of his eloquence, and of Miss De Vesci's patience, he fortunately caught a glimpse of Lady Robert's hat as she loitered with Lady Cosmo Somerset among the fragrant thickets of the broomy knoll ; when leaving his further explanations to the charge of " his young friend," he set off to recapitulate his evidence to his wife and her companion with the same

leathern and inexpressive visage, in the same sentences of inconclusive dulness.

“ I had thought, Minnie—until Lord Robert was so obliging as to correct my error this morning—that you purposely refrained from joining in the gaieties of the season. I understood from Mary that you had made up your mind to decline all invitations for the present.”

“ There is nothing very dissipated I should imagine,” replied Minnie, rather pettishly, “ in a morning visit to Ebury. My own stupid company and the solitary banks of the lake, are the attractions by which you have found me enticed from Portman-square.”

Mr. Willingham cast his eyes according to the indication of her own, upon the surrounding scenery ; where, at the moment, no single human being appeared to mar the sylvan solitude of the spot.

“ The *attractions* you find here, are probably of reminiscent origin,” said he, carelessly.

“The Ebury of to-day has, indeed, little to offer you.”

“You are right, Charles—for once, *quite* right,” replied Minnie, speaking with determined courage, as if in defiance of his insinuations. “It is the remembrance of this very spot, as I found it on my *last* visit, which has moved my heart with feelings of mingled joy and bitterness, exquisitely painful—but which I would not exchange for those of unmixed happiness.”

Mr. Willingham now felt himself compelled by formal politeness to offer his arm to his cousin, that they might seek the remainder of the party; and in their progress, it chanced that they were obliged to follow the very same footpath through the long grass, which, on the day of Minnie’s girlish adventure, they had pursued with Lord Stapylford. He even fancied he could perceive Miss De Vesci’s arm tremble with emotion as they passed the lodge wherein her mischance had been concealed from Lady

Maria's angry detection; but it is probable that he was mistaken in his conjecture; for in another moment Minnie, rallying her spirits, began in her turn a bantering attack upon her cousin, touching *his* appearance at Ebury among a set of the idlest triflers of the day.

“ I was not aware, Charles, that *you*, a grave politician—a reformer—a statesman, ever found yourself tempted into such vain and frivolous society.”

“ Nor does it often occur ;—but—”

“ But the very moment Lord Robert proposed a plan of pleasure to your acceptance, you were only too happy in finding an excuse to desert the respectable congregation of square-toes, in St. James's-street, and fly to Ebury Park.”

“ Exactly ! for I had a latent motive which urgently prompted my seeming want of resolution.”

“ Of course.—How could you be otherwise than anxious to ascertain if pretty little Lady

Cosmo Somerset be truly so lovely as report avoucheth."

"As I have frequently the pleasure of dining with Lord Cosmo, you must seek further."

"You probably wished to make the acquaintance of the fair-haired Saxon duke, and his Mephistopheles."

"Wrong again! I have known them these three weeks. The moment Monsieur de Béthizy became aware that I was cousin to the rich Miss De Vesci, he begged to be presented to me, by way of advancing a step nearer towards an introduction to yourself."

"I trust you were charitable enough to forewarn him that Miss De Vesci—rich or poor—does not share in the passion entertained by her family for foreigners."

"Of Miss De Vesci's opinions and preferences I have lately known so little, that it would be the height of presumption on my part to make any declaration of the sort."

"I am at least glad to find you *conscious*

of the alienation. I was apprehensive that Minnie had too entirely escaped your memory—to—”

“ *Minnie*—alas ! my dear cousin !—has altogether ceased *to be*—both for myself and others ! My sister has long lost her little pupil, and I my little playfellow ; and Miss De Vesci, meantime, has attracted too many friends, too many followers, too many flatterers, to have allowed us to find any compensation in *her* society for all we have been obliged to renounce.”

“ You do not admit, then, that it has been your own want of cordiality and Mary’s coldness which have so sadly limited my visits to Grosvenor-square ? You are *unjust*, Charles, as well as ungracious ; for you are perfectly aware, that till this moment’s interview—the result of chance—you have not given me a single opportunity for unrestrained conversation with you, since my return to England.”

“ I do not deny it !—To what end should I

seek your society?—You are now surrounded by the tender cares of your own family—by the adulation of the world;—Lady Maria has ever regarded me with an unfavourable eye, and between your sisters and myself scarcely the common sympathy and friendliness of kindred has been permitted to exist.”

“ But you are not ignorant that my mother and sisters do not materially influence *my* feelings towards the rest of the world; nor interpose the slightest restraint upon my intercourse with my friends? Among those—among the very few whom I may presume to call so—there is not *one* particularly acceptable to my family; yet I have never found them inclined to oppose my predilections.”

“ Indeed!” exclaimed Mr. Willingham, with an incredulous air, which summoned a guilty blush to the cheeks of his companion.

“ Besides,” resumed Minnie, “ if no kind feeling towards one whose childhood you were once so forward in fostering and protecting,

has proved sufficiently powerful to engage you to overlook any little petulant quarrel arising between us, the common courtesies of life might have prompted an occasional visit of *ceremony* to the widow and daughters of your uncle."

"I have so long been taught to feel miserably unqualified 'to amble gently in a lady's chamber,' that I have renounced the general society of the gay world. You well know that you have often yourself upbraided me as a mere bookworm;—have you not?" said Charles Willingham, evidently touched and gratified by Miss De Vesci's remonstrances.

"Every worm has its butterfly season! By your own account you dine frequently with the Cosmo Somersets, who belong exclusively to the great world; and as to your feats as a carpet knight, I am satisfied that you do not refrain from ambling in Mary's drawing-room—who is the only person boasting a nearer claim upon you than myself."

“ Mary is satisfied to take me as I am ;— with all my uncouth, unfashionable habits ; and Mary has no other friend to counsel and protect her.”

“ And who have *I* ?—What brother affords me his sanction or his advice ?”

“ You have your guardian, Mr. Lorimer, to fulfil both duties !”

“ If you will trouble yourself, Charles, to recollect, it may occur to you, that before Mr. Lorimer’s office existed—long, very long before my uncle’s death—you had adopted your present line of conduct towards me. Before I left Heddeston to visit the De Vescis, you had ceased to treat me with kindness and confidence.”

“ Indeed !—you seem to note my misdemeanors with a very accurate registry ! But you will at least allow yourself to be *at present* better guarded and more tenderly cherished than poor Mary, whose claims upon my affection you are willing to reject.”

“ If you mean through my engagement to

Lord Stapylford," said Miss De Vesci, attempting to retain a tone of composure, "I think your own observation must have satisfied you that it has afforded me very little support in the world, and *as little* self-gratulation. If you allude to the kindness of my guardian, Mr. Lorimer—which, under very trying circumstances, was certainly most generously extended towards me—allow me to remind you, that the advice and consolation which must necessarily travel by the post from Naples to London, is somewhat tardy in its operation, and difficult of command."

"I may therefore offer you my congratulations;—for Lorimer will very shortly arrive in England: and my services will become too quickly unavailing to render it necessary to offer them now, at the eleventh hour."

"I have been long aware that Lorimer would leave Naples before the close of the summer;—a circumstance, Charles, which need scarcely have interrupted your visits in the interim."

“ He will be here within a few weeks ! My object in visiting Ebury Park this morning was to acquaint you with an event which you ought not to learn from strangers.”

“ An event ?—you alarm me ! Has any thing happened to Frederick ? ”

“ *To Frederick*—nothing ! But Lord Lorimer, on leaving the committee-room of the House of Lords, was seized with an attack of apoplexy ; and, as it is foreign post-day, I thought it right instantly to expedite the intelligence to his son, with a request for his immediate return to England.—Lady Wyndham, who was too much agitated to address her brother on this melancholy occasion, desired me to acquaint Mr. Lorimer that no hope was entertained of her father’s recovery.”

“ How very dreadful !—how very sudden !—that vain, pompous, heartless man to be so unexpectedly summoned to his account, and with no one to regret or lament over him.”

“ Lady Lorimer,” observed Mr. Willingham,

in a tone of some severity, “is a woman of sound principles—of sterling excellence; and although there may exist persons to be benefited by the death of this poor, old, selfish man, who may regard his sudden decease as a matter of indifference, or even of exultation, yet I venture to believe—to *trust* for human nature’s sake—that his wife will not lightly regard the loss of the husband of her youth—the father of her children—the companion of her long and honourable life! Lord Lorimer has been a man of unblemished moral character—free from the stains of every grosser vice—and highly respectable in his degree; and I am unwilling to suppose that such a person can pass to his grave unmourned, at least by those of whose being he is the author.”

“You have interpreted a casual remark somewhat severely. Heaven forbid that I should imagine Lord Lorimer’s family insensible to his loss; but as a member of society—as a Christian—and as a man—I cannot but consider him

a selfish, hollow, sordid, timeserving, ostentatious personage ; incapable of any noble virtue, and bowing the knee to Baal, wherever the molten image may chance to be set up."

" It is yourself, Minnie, who are caustic and severe now," said Mr. Willingham, smiling at the vehemence of strictures which were only too critically correct. " But you at least have no reason to deal upon this erring brother so rigid a measure of justice ; for I understand that since your return from Naples, he has left no effort unattempted to conciliate your feelings towards his family."

" Lord Lorimer has been indeed singularly gracious. All-statesman as he is, and in despite of his gray hairs, *he* at least entertains no disinclination for ambling in ladies' chambers."

" He is probably pre-encouraged by the certainty of a favourable reception ;—he is conscious of claims upon Miss De Vesci's polite forbearance."

" Of claims superior to your own ?—You can

hardly think it, Charles!—His son is by law my guardian;—his excellent, his delightful wife, is by my choice, and by her own condescension, my friend. But what were *you*, what was Mary—when I was left in England, a little friendless and deserted thing!—unportioned—uncared for;—with no protection but through the mercy of your family—no consolation but through the tender affection of my two cousins.”

Miss De Vesci’s voice trembled so feelingly as she spoke, that Charles Willingham could not refrain from pressing her arm to his side. “You overrate our deeds, my dear cousin,” said he in a low voice, “as much as you have suffered yourself to undervalue our feelings towards you; yet for your own sake, as well as for ours, I could wish that you had never been induced to think differently.”

“I never have—believe me—trust me—I never have.”

“Hush! hush!—do not let us renew our long chapter of grievances. And above all, do

not give my friend Lorimer—(almost as old a friend, Minnie, as yourself)—reason to suspect, on his return, that I have neglected his charge to watch over you during your separation, and to contribute to your happiness by the scanty means afforded me.”

“ And *did* Frederick delegate this commission to your hands?—How kindly done—how like himself!—From the period that I first began to share in the sports of your Heddeston holidays, Mr. Lorimer has been undeviating in the brotherly friendliness of his conduct towards me. *He* indeed offered me no professions, nor made it a point of conscience to judge severely of my motives and actions; but he has never wounded me by caprice, nor humiliated me by neglect.”

“ Verily he has his reward ! ” ejaculated Mr. Willingham, with irrepressible vexation. “ For he has acquired the power of teaching you to forget feelings which others had believed to be indelible—to break through ties which others

had imagined to be immutable. He has made you renounce every thing—Minnie! excepting your love and confidence for himself.”

“ I must leave him to plead his own cause with his former friends,” replied Minnie; “ for I find that my eloquence scarcely avails even in my own favour. But since we are about to enter the magic circle of fashionable sorcery”—they had already reached the outskirts of the lawn, and were within sight of the gay groups scattered over its verdant level—“ suffer me previously to express my hopes that a degree of better understanding is about to exist between us; and that if your avocations are such as to prevent all friendly intercourse with any but your political associates, you will not attempt to dissuade my dear cousin Mary from treating me with the regard and affection which was once the solace of my life.”

“ *I* dissuade! Can you suppose—”

“ Not a word more! We are within reach of Lady Grayfield’s inquisitorial powers. I

choose to feel myself satisfied that you are somewhat more kindly disposed towards me.”

Lady Maria Willingham, who, from her station in the conservatory, had detected the approach of her favourite daughter, advanced—rheumatism notwithstanding—into the open air, to greet her with the intelligence of Lord Lorimer’s sudden decease; which had been brought from town by one of the latest loiterers of the party. She was exceedingly curious to discover the effect which this distressing event would produce upon the feelings of Miss De Vesci; and was slightly but silently shocked by the equanimity of deportment with which she received the intelligence of her lover’s accession to the peerage.

“ I verily believe,” thought Lady Maria, as she quickly retraced her steps towards the house, in order to secure an advantageous post previous to the announcement of dinner, “ I verily believe that Minnie would be quite as well contented to become a paltry Mrs. Frederick Lo-

rimer as to find herself a Viscountess. I certainly am blessed with the most inaccessible, insensible daughters in the world !”

In this opinion, by the way, her ladyship was strikingly mistaken; one among those three daughters being at that moment a martyr to the bitterest torments of remorse. Eleanor Willingham, even seated as she was by the side of Sir Comyne Wallace during dinner, listening to his gentle nothings, and pledging him in Champagne, could not forgive or forget the perverseness of her destiny, which had urged her to the refusal of the only man for whom her heart had felt a preference; and who, from the moment of her rejection, had run through every gradation of prosperity towards his present eminence as a Viscount, with a fortune of twenty thousand a-year! She seemed to have declined the hand of Mr. Frederick Lorimer—the paltry contemptible younger brother—only that he might eventually be enabled to lay his coronet

and his opulence at the feet of her sister Minnie!"

A thousand circumstances conspired to augment her regrets and self-accusation. Immediately opposite to her at table, sat Miss De Vesci, unusually excited by the events and agitation of the morning, and consequently animated into a double portion of youthful beauty; appearing to engross the exclusive attention of her cousin, Mr. Willingham, whom Claudia and herself had always allowed themselves to treat with marked neglect; and whom they now discovered to have acquired, during their absence from England, a very considerable influence in society, independently of his brilliant worldly prospects. He was looked up to as one of the most rising men of the day, even in that very select circle of the aristocracy, which formed the utmost limit of their own desires and interest. Either of them would have found in the only son of Sir Joseph Willingham "a match" equal to

the most sanguine hopes of their ambition; but till very lately they had continued to regard him as the sandy-haired offset of the Bodham *mésalliance*, and obscure beyond the redemption of fortune or of title. It was *now* too late!—Eleanor felt that it was too late! In her cousin Charles she had forfeited a second chance of an auspicious matrimonial connexion!

Another unpleasing object attracted her attention in the course of the repast. Sufficiently near to her sister Claudia to afford a very trying daylight contrast to her somewhat faded complexion and sharpened features, she detected two strikingly lovely girls, in the first bloom of youthful innocence; gentle and unassuming in their air, but acquiring through that very absence of pretension, a charm beyond the practised graces of worldly art. Eleanor Willingham looked at these rival buds of beauty, again and again, and with eager scrutiny; and satisfied herself that she had

never seen them before. But she could not so readily account for some sort of indefinite mental reminiscence, which appeared to attach itself to the lady by whom they were accompanied. She was quite young and rather pretty ; but had contrived to modulate the expression of her features into so rigid an air of precision and misanthropic coldness, that it would have been difficult to decide upon her age, and was impossible to conjecture the position she occupied with regard to her fair companions. Eleanor Willingham felt her personal curiosity strongly excited by the whole party ; and accordingly whispered an inquiry in Italian to Lady Robert Lorton ; who was placed near her, monopolized by the tough intricacies of a cut-and-dried “ dinner discourse ” with Mr. Russell ; — the ex-beau, and actual conversation-man.

“ Do you not know them ? ” whispered Lady Robert, in return. “ They are the Barringhursts ; — two charming girls, and, as

you perceive, the image of their miserable mother.”

“And that person in the dark-green pelisse is Lord Barringhurst’s present wife? I feel as if I ought to recollect her, without remembering why or where.”

Lady Robert answered by a significant look, seeming to advise a postponement of the inquiry; and Sir Comyne Wallace, in compassion to the inquisitive vein of his fair friend, observed in a low voice to Eleanor, “She was governess to the girls;—a saint of Lady Grayfield’s selection, who contrived to inveigle Lord Barringhurst into promoting her to the head of his table, and the guardianship of his motherless daughters, by the professed severity of her principles and practice. We will forgive him, poor man, for mistaking reverse of wrong for right;—for fancying that as a highly-born, and highly-bred, and highly-agreeable woman had turned out so ill, he had scope for better expectations in a clergyman’s daughter; secure

from all connexions and friendships in the great world; and as chillingly disagreeable as his most conscientious self-denial could require. Lady Grayfield and the Duchess swear she is a miracle of accomplishments and excellence; for my own part I never look at her without wishing that Tichborne had chosen to wither *her* prospects, and exile *her* from our society, instead of that gentle, graceful Lady Barringhurst;—who I verily believe was indebted for her ruin to the indolent impossibility of opposition. We could have much better spared this Miss Milicent Darnham.”

“Darnham? — ah! the mystery is now explained; her father was our Heddeston curate! This very Lady Barringhurst, as a child, was our constant playmate, and exactly such an automaton of wire and buckram as she still appears.”

“Automaton or not, you will hear her commonplace opinions quoted in the Duchess’s set, as momentous axioms of an original system

of ethics. She always appears to me like a child's copy-book, or a marble-paper juvenile edition of 'The Blossoms of Morality,' put into action. Her conversation is made up of sententious declamations ;—not of 'prose run mad ;'—but of prose extremely calculated to render other people so."

"What is the cause of the tremendous stir at the other end of the table ?—Even the Duchess of Lisborough appears roused to animation !"

"Did you not hear the groom of the chambers whisper an announcement of the mighty Empress of the West ? who always manages to increase the evidence of her importance by these tardy arrivals. Excepting in a family-dinner with her Lord, I do not believe she has seen fish or soup upon the table for several years."

"In former times I remember that no one presumed to take those liberties with the Duke of Lisborough ;—the Calmersfield guests ate

and drank and slept by the moment-hand of a chronometer. But of what Empress are you speaking?"

"England can bear but one Elizabeth!" as our bonny Bess said of yore to her lovely Scottish rival; and London can endure but one Lady Radbourne."

"I remember the day when that very *one* was voted one too many, by half the fashionable world; and was utterly overlooked by the other half."

"Hush!—hush! such treason will bring you to the block. See with what eagerness they all rise to welcome that colossal goddess;—observe with what condescension she accepts their incense. *Treason* did I say! one 'choleric word' against Lady Radbourne is now 'flat blasphemy!'"

"They might just as well worship the huge marble head of Memnon in the British Museum."

"Once more, take pity on yourself, and

refrain from such adventurous libels ! Do you remember Horace Walpole's allusion to a very apposite fable in which, at the close of a prolonged war among the beasts, Cornet Hog comes to be a Field-marshal, and Corporal Ass to be a Commander-in-chief ?—Such is the progress of fashionable warfare ! Patronesses of Almacks are mere mortals ; one woman of *ton* dies—another, like Lady Barringhurst, runs away—a third, like Lady Desmond, vibrates between devotion and bluestockingism, and is lost to the wicked and the ignorant world. What is to be done ?—The ministry must be filled up—the cabinet-council must sit ;—and those who, like Lady Radbourne, have patience to beat about upon the Goodwin Sands of insignificance, waiting the turn of the tide, are sure to find themselves afloat at last, and sailing majestically into port.”

“Like a stately seventy-four as she is !—Nevertheless I should have thought that Lady Robert Lorton's little yacht-club would

have manœuvred to keep her out of the harbour.”

“And why?—since not one of their number would have been at the trouble of deafening themselves with all the royal salutes a flagship is obliged to fire. They would have been bored to death by the rigid maintenance of martial law and nautical subordination, which it is the business and pleasure of her life to uphold.”

“Still I cannot fancy that Lady Robert enjoys seeing her become the tyrant of the high seas.”

“Lady Robert recedes every season still further from the tumults and disputes of the great world; she has never recovered that affair of Lady Barringhurst’s, which cut her to the very heart; her own daughters are growing up—are almost presentable;—and, excepting from family etiquette with the Lisboroughs, and from choice with Lady Rachel Verney, and Somerset’s charming wife, she maintains very little inter-

course with society. You must have found us sadly dispersed—sadly altered ; nevertheless I trust your return will form a keystone to a new arch, and that the best days of our little set will be renewed.”

Sir Comyne Wallace sighed as she spoke ; but it was less from the influence of any sentimental emotion, than from the unsatisfactory recollection of his wasted youth ; wasted upon a tribe of useless objects, and upon that little knot of associates whose dispersion he affected to regret. His interest in Eleanor herself arose in a great measure from her personal connexion in his mind with those buoyant days of youth, when the ordinary march of existence assumes the airy charm of a dream. He felt that they had left him nothing to cling to in the way of substantial happiness ; and rather than exert himself to seek new objects of ambition or affection, he feebly extended his hand in companionship to one who had run the same idle course of levity with the same fruitless results as himself.

He had serious thoughts of proposing himself at some future time to Miss Willingham's acceptance; but he felt the measure to be so much a matter of routine—so much like paying an annual bill, or dismissing his hunters to the strawyard—that he evinced little of a lover's eagerness in a pursuit where he felt pre-assured of victory.

Meanwhile Miss De Vesci seemed destined to enjoy at this eventful meeting, the first-fruits of her heiress-ship; and to receive confirmation strong of the justice of her cousin Charles's decision, that Monsieur De Béthizy had sought his intimacy solely with a view to the future acquaintance of the lady of Bensleigh Park. Seated at dinner between the two—between the calm undemonstrative Mr. Willingham, and the vivacious, eager, and garrulous foreigner—she diverted herself not a little with their various modes of rendering themselves agreeable. Charles seemed only anxious to excite *her* to conversation—to de-

velop *her* views and feelings ;—while Béthizy, even in the hottest discharge of his torrent of words, found occasion to allude to nothing and to no person but himself. To a certain degree he was clever and brilliant ;—his repartees and anecdotes were sparkling and original ; but from beginning to end, they were, in fact, only portraits of Monsieur le Comte de Béthizy—miniatures, full-lengths, busts, and statues !

For a moment Minnie was almost inclined to be pleased by the liveliness of his flattery, and by his insinuating address ; but when she discovered that his unceasing loquacity proved an impediment to Mr. Willingham's attempts at a renewal of his confidential conversation—when she perceived that her cousin was really mortified by seeing her exposed to the interested devotion of a fortune-hunter—she became at once disgusted by Monsieur de Béthizy's pretensions. It was not, indeed, that Charles Willingham believed her in the slightest danger of becoming ensnared by the wily approaches of

the handsome young Frenchman ; but sharing in all the prejudices entertained by thorough-going English country-gentlemen against foreigners in general, and fortune-hunting foreigners in particular, he felt irritated by this ocular demonstration of the perils, and dangers, and presumptuous designs to which his beloved cousin was exposed by her accession of fortune. He was, in fact, as delicately tenacious touching the conduct pursued by other men towards Miss De Vesci, as if she had been a sister of his own.

It was a relief to both parties when the evening, which proved majestically dull in all its arrangements, was over, and the carriages ordered for their return to town ; for the bearleader of the Duke of Saxe-Altenburg having once secured his long-coveted presentation to the far-famed heiress of Bensleigh, appeared resolved to profit by the privilege, by preventing the access of all other aspirants to her side.

During their delicious homeward drive—delicious from the balmy quietude of a premature summer evening—Miss De Vesci scarcely opened her lips ;—she had, in truth, acquired during the day a thousand unexpected causes of emotion and interest.

CHAPTER V.

But woman

In that dread forfeiture renounceth all !—
Shame—honour—kindred—offspring—and her right,
Her *birthright* heritage of fair entreatment
By all of sterner sex. A fallen woman
Of all earth's abject things is still the basest !

Fletcher.

CLAUDIA and Eleanor, with that excellent providence of arrangement usually distinguishing young ladies who have danced through a certain number of balls, flirted through a certain number of flirtations, and enlivened by their trifling accomplishments a certain number of Christmas and Easter holidays at a certain number of country-houses—had contrived, in the course of their dull festivities at Ebury, to

insinuate into the mind of the inert Lady Robert a pressing desire to visit the collection of old masters at the British Gallery on the morrow; and having made their engagement to accompany her within hearing of Lord Basingstoke and Sir Comyne, they were of course pretty well assured that both gentlemen would be in waiting at the door to hand them out of the carriage.

Lord Basingstoke, the eldest son of the Marquis of Lancaster, and owing his sole importance, in the eyes of the Willinghams, to that valuable distinction, was like themselves recently returned from a tolerably long residence on the Continent. For an heir-apparent he was by no means ill-looking or deficient; and like other young men who have run the gauntlet of Eton, Oxford, and the grand tour, and lived in society from the earliest age, he had picked up a sort of colloquial flippancy, a large portion of cant phrases, and lively allusions, which are apt to pass for wit with those who mix less

freely with the world. He was animated, in short, and entertaining ; and as, amid the parrot repartees he had taught himself to echo, the greater portion assumed a volatile and even libertine character, he was regarded as one who probably lived and thought and felt as freely as he spoke.

Being thus pretty universally estimated as a mere trifler, the numerous Mammas, who were already on the watch to entangle him for their Lady Janes and Lady Sophias—who were wont to offer him a corner of their carriage home after a rainy Almacks, and to force upon his acceptance a card for the ball of “ their particular friend Lady Bellamont, who had quite set her heart upon making his acquaintance,”—felt themselves free from all danger of his suspecting their motives, or turning with disgust from the detection of their manœuvres. It is astonishing, indeed, with what pertinacity the Dowagers of London delude themselves into a persuasion that the *new* young men of the

season are blind to their artifices, and ready to fall into the matrimonial pitfall. They forget the freemasonry of the clubs—of the military messes—of the gossip of the park—revealing from one to another the springes and decoys spread for their captivation. They forget the regular tribe of *pavé* loungers, and guardsmen, and officials, who watch and record the pretensions and failures of successive seasons; who are always ready with their accurate date of Lady Juliana's *début*, and with their malicious recital of all the unsuccessful matrimonial speculations of all the young ladies annually emerging from Medea's cauldron, in the tender sweetness of renovated girlhood!

Claudia Willingham was persuaded that Lord Basingstoke felt himself singularly flattered by the graciousness of her smiles; that he attributed them solely to his personal merit; that he was totally unconscious of the charm attached to his future Marquisate and its fifty thousand a-year; and that, unless Lady Radbourne, who

had recently taken it into her roomy head to make him the object of her first attempt for her frightful daughter, should succeed in robbing her of her prey—she had a very positive chance of becoming Lady Basingstoke before the close of the season.

And what was the reverse of this well-spread and well-dissembled tapestry? What was the true state of Lord Basingstoke's feelings on the subject?—From the time his little Lordship had attained his second year, the head nurse of the Lancastrian nursery had been indefatigable in instilling into his mind a sense of his own importance; and long before he had attained the sixth form, his Lady-mother the Marchioness had begun to warn him against the artifices of female cunning likely to arise therefrom, and array themselves against him. On leaving England for his continental tour, Lord Lancaster had accompanied a very liberal pecuniary provision to his son, with the strictest injunctions to be on his guard against the innu-

merable female adventurers eagerly on the watch at Paris and Rome for the boy-lordlings who parade their cub-inanity through all the various courts of Europe; and scarcely had he returned to London and its wider mart of matrimonial traffic, when his aunt Lady C. began to caution him against Lady D. and Lady E.;—while one consanguineous Dowager ventured “to hint as a friend” that the two Miss Boscawens, who were always enticing him into their mother’s opera-box, had been out for at least seven seasons, and were flirts of the most acknowledged publicity; and another presumed on distant relationship to let him know, that Lady Damer had been heard to make very intelligible remarks on the frequency of his Lordship’s morning visits, and his enthusiastic admiration of her daughter Laura’s style upon the harp.

Lord Basingstoke, in fact, in spite of his appearing “*sans armes comme l’innocence, sans ailes comme la constance*,” was clad in a secret cuirass of proof against the darts and lances of Rad-

bournes, and Willinghams, and of every other fascinating being who smiled upon him from the satin sofas of Willis's rooms. He was selfish enough to accept all their little attentions, and amuse himself with their seemingly artless devotion;—he allowed them to fight for him among themselves with all the rancour of feminine eagerness;—to drive him about—ride with him—fawn upon him—form dinner-parties for his amusement—and little sentimental nose-gays for his delectation. But his vigilant heart was always on the *qui vive* for self-defence; and he was just as likely to fall a victim either to an open attack, or a cunning ambuscade, as the coarse and filthy soil of Hyde Park is likely to throw up a crop of violets or lilies of the valley! Of this, however, Claudia little dreamed, as she smiled upon him from beneath her most becoming hat, and listened applaudingly to his ignorant criticisms upon one of the most graceful productions of Murillo, on which they were gazing together, as a mere apology for

being together. Basingstoke was very well satisfied that the officer on guard, and two or three members of his club who were swinging the tassels of their canes on the adjoining benches, should perceive with what enamoured delight the fashionable and still lovely Miss Willingham hung upon his accents; and Claudia was equally content that one or two of Lady Radbourne's set, and twice as many of her own, should observe her to be thus publicly attended by a very elegant young man, and one of the best matches in London.

Eleanor meanwhile was equally satisfied in listening to Sir Comyne Wallace's languid nothings—comprising a pretty exact repetition of the expressions he had annually uttered to various detachments of “black, brown, or fair,” in that very gallery, during the preceding eight or ten years of his life. Every season, indeed, they became somewhat less fervent—every season the pictures he affected to admire produced a feebler impression on his eye, and the damsels

to whom he addressed his comments, an infinitely feebler impression on his heart. Yet still what could he do better to get rid of himself and his idleness, than to lounge before the one, and whisper to the other?—how could he more readily unite the busy vacuity of his club-lounge over the daily papers, with his park-lounge over the side of some fashionable carriage, than by the *pons asinorum* of an unmeaning flirtation?

At length every exquisite Titian and energetic Vandyke, had been discussed in the contemptible jargon of fashionable irony; a thousand silly things had been said and laughed at by way of wit, and no further communication remained to be sought and accorded, but—

“Shall you be at Almack’s early to-night?”

“Certainly!—unless we are detained at Lady Eleanor L.’s.”

In another moment they were seated in Lady Robert Lorton’s barouche.

“And now that I have done my part in the

laborious pleasures of the day," said Lady Robert, addressing herself to both, "you must grant me a favour in return for my chaperonage!"

"Dearest Lady Robert!" exclaimed Claudia and Eleanor in the same breath, "how happy you will make us in an occasion of obliging you."

"You must accompany me to Grosvenor-square, and present me to your cousin Miss Willingham."

"To Grosvenor-square!" exclaimed Claudia.

"To our cousin Mary!" ejaculated Eleanor.

"May I order the servants to proceed there without delay?"

"Certainly—unquestionably—if you desire it; but I cannot imagine—you so strangely surprise me——"

"You surely cannot be aware," interrupted Eleanor, "with what a decidedly humdrum piece of still life you wish to form an acquaintance?"

“Hear me, and judge of my motives!” replied Lady Robert, gravely. “I had occasion to observe yesterday at Ebury, that a considerable intimacy subsists between Miss De Vesci and Lady Barringhurst; and on questioning your sister on the subject—who by the way is one of the most fascinating and elegant persons with whom I ever conversed—I learnt that their acquaintance commenced years ago at Heddeston Court; that Miss Willingham had in former times been at some pains to bestow a portion of her own accomplishments on the curate’s daughter, with a view to their contributing eventually to the support of her family; and that the *ci-devant* Miss Darnham is in fact materially indebted to the kindness and patronage of your cousin Mary.”

“I believe Minnie’s account of the business has considerably moderated the picture. The Darnhams were actually indebted to my uncle Sir Joseph for their support; and this odious Lady Barringhurst was educated chiefly at his expense.”

“ I am therefore most anxious to engage your cousin’s assistance in counteracting the evil influence of Charlotte Grayfield and of the Duchess of Lisborough over her mind : I want her assistance to thaw the rigid virtue of this promising member of the All-Excellent *caste*.”

“ But Mary is far more likely to uphold her in her original severity ; Mary herself is rich in a double portion of scrupulous purity and prudery.”

“ Not of a species likely to counteract *my* views, if countenance be any clue to character. Miss Willingham’s is angelically mild and feminine ; and as I wish to interest her in a work of mercy, I have great reliance upon her co-operation.”

“ Oh ! if you have a sick or destitute family in the Seven Dials to dispose of, you cannot do better for them than bequeath them to the care of Mary Willingham ; she would prefer so liberal a gift to a new necklace.”

“No! dear Eleanor!—mine is a far more pressing interest—yet a far less commendable object of solicitation. I want to engage your cousin’s kindness in favour of poor Lucy—”

“Of the former Lady Barringhurst?”

“Even so!”

“I was not aware that you had any further communication with her;—surely you do not visit a *divorcée*?”

“*Visit* is scarcely a term to apply to the sick—the dying—the broken-hearted!—I afford her such consolations by my friendship and society, as befit her misery and our former intimacy; but, alas! there are no attentions of mine which can obliterate the perpetual irritations of remorse!—there are no soothing words which *I* am capable of breathing, that can supersede with a dying mother the voices of her children.”

“And is she really dying?” inquired Claudia in compassionate accents. “Poor Lady Barringhurst! how pleasing, and how gentle

she was !—I never saw any person more softly feminine in her manners and habits ;—nor could I ever understand by what infatuation she became a prey to so notorious a libertine as Mr. Tichborne.”

“Through the influence of evil counsellors, acting upon a mind devoid of sterling Christian principles, Claudia ;—a case too common to be much wondered at. Lucy Tichborne was an only and a motherless daughter ; and Lord Robert Tichborne, in providing her, on her first appearance in the world, with a handsome equipage and allowance, and procuring her a good Opera-box and her subscriptions to Almack’s, satisfied himself that he had fully executed every paternal duty. Her cousin, Harry Tichborne, the idlest and most dissipated man about town, was constantly at the house ; admitted with equal familiarity to Lucy’s confidence, and to Lord Robert’s table. But then his uncle knew him to be no marrying man ; and fearing nothing for the hand of his daughter, he appears

to have regarded her heart and mind as of very small account in the affair."

"You do not mean to say that Lady Barringhurst was attached to her cousin previous to her marriage?"

"That is a point which either of the parties themselves would probably feel puzzled to decide. I can only answer for it that when Lord Barringhurst—who was a vain, self-sufficient man, solely occupied with himself and with his official duties, applied for Lucy's hand—it was Harry Tichborne to whom the indifference of her father on the occasion, induced her to apply for advice."

"It is true that she had no brother, to whom she could refer herself for any particulars of his general character and conduct. And what, after all, were the counsels of so sapient an adviser as Mr. Tichborne?"

"That she should not hesitate to accept a man of his consequence and fortune!—He was well aware that Lord Barringhurst's cold heart

and preoccupied mind would not fail, in a year or two, to leave his young wife to herself—”

“And to *himself*!”

“Exactly;—and the fact proved the justice of his forethought. Tichborne was always at the house, always by Lucy’s side, riding with her—dancing and driving in town; or walking with her in the beautiful woods of Wilmount, and playing with her children in the country!”

“I never saw a fonder mother than Lady Barringhurst.”

“It was my observation of that very fact which always induced me to trust in her moral safety. She was attached, too, to Lord Barringhurst, although deeply wounded by his indifferent negligence; and I am persuaded that had he given himself the least trouble to secure her affections, or to watch over her conduct, his tenderness would have served to counteract, in a single day, Mr. Tichborne’s manœuvres for previous years.”

“Mr. Tichborne was too *brusque* and sensual a person to attach so delicate and gentle a woman, except under very peculiar circumstances.”

“He was always by her side, and always under a confidential character of relationship which disarmed suspicion. But the worst circumstance attending the case was Lucy’s intimacy with Mrs. Grandison.”

“With the present Lady Wroxton? It certainly was an inconceivable infatuation.”

“By no means *inconceivable*;—pernicious—but pernicious only. Mrs. Grandison was one of the most agreeable women in the world—and, in spite of her undisguised sins, warmly cherished by the world; and Lucy very naturally took her in womanly friendship to her bosom, nor discovered her error, till she had herself been guilty of every other.”

“We were at Paris, I think, when the sad exposure took place.”

“I had just left you there. I returned to England in time to witness the public disgrace

of a woman whom I sincerely loved ; and with the afflicting certainty that had I never left her, I might possibly have prevented, and certainly retarded the progress of her ruin. Poor—poor Lucy ! ”

“ Lord Barringhurst, after his long patient years of calm and wilful blindness, broke out at last, if I remember, with the most extravagant violence.”

“ He turned Mr. Tichborne out of doors, and committed his wife by the most insulting publicity of reprimand, at a time when she was innocent of every crime but that of gross imprudence. Lucy was wounded and humiliated beyond all conception ;—she had no person on whom to rely for advice in such an emergency, nor even for consolation ; for Miss Darnham, who was at that time governess to her children, was delegated by Lord Barringhurst to maintain a sort of *espionnage* over her intercourse with them.”

“ And the consequence proved that in a

moment of bitterness, she eloped from Wilmount !”

“And that Henry Tichborne was known to have engaged the house in town, in which she sought shelter from the shame and mortifications that had been heaped upon her. Every thing, in short, was proved that was necessary to Lord Barringhurst’s purpose ;—he divorced her within a few months—”

“And Mr. Tichborne ?”—

“Abandoned her !”

“Good Heavens ! how gross a pitch of ingratitude !”

“*He* pretended otherwise. *He* declared that he felt himself bound by no ties of honour to a woman, who had been driven into his arms *solely* by her husband’s harshness and perversity.”

“A charge which tends, at least, to exonerate *her*. But her friends—her family—did they advance nothing in her defence towards obtaining justice from her seducer ?”

“Her father was dead ; she had no brother ; and, that which was every one’s business was nobody’s ! After the scandal of the divorce had been worn threadbare by the gossip of the day, Lucy, and her sins, and her afflictions, were alike forgotten ; and she was left to live or die upon the pittance accorded by the law, as suited best with her penitence. If you could but see her as *I* have seen her ! deserted—lonely—helpless—hopeless !—and yearning with the bitter agony of a mother’s heart for a sight of those beloved children who, in a crisis of desperation, she had been tempted to abandon !—”

“Not deserted—not altogether lonely, dearest Lady Robert ! I am persuaded that *your* kindness has never allowed you to overlook the wretchedness of a repentant sinner ! And her friend Lady Wroxton, who is permanently settled in London, surely *she* has afforded every consolation in her power to her miserable victim ?”

“Ay ! Claudia ! and in *vouchsafing* to afford

it has filled the envenomed cup of bitterness even to overflowing. Were I now so situated as to be anxious respecting the stability of some married woman's principles of conjugal fidelity—as occurred to me on a former occasion touching this unhappy Lucy herself—it is scarcely so much the abandonment of the world which I would strive to force upon her apprehensions as an unfailing penalty of her crime, as the condescending notice of such of her own sex as have rendered themselves despicable by their frailties; yet escaped, under a cloak of cunning, the censure of the world.”

“But surely Lady Wroxton cannot be said to have escaped its censures?”

“She has eluded the branding-iron of divorce;—which forms, with so many, the cherub's flaming sword of boundary.”

“Through the fatuity of her former husband.”

“We all know what Mrs. Grandison was—we all saw it—we all felt it with disgust. No

woman could more flagrantly outrage the common decencies of society. But through one of those caprices of destiny, or of the men and women whom we are pleased to call the world, the sentence she had braved failed to overtake her; even as we sometimes trace an intermediary spot which the scorching course of the electric flame has disdained to smite."

"And then her immense wealth secured her the seeming extenuation of a brilliant second marriage."

"Brilliant!—if you could but see the scorn, the humiliating contempt with which she is treated, at times, by Sir Cæsar Wroxton! nor, if her own evidence is to be believed, does he altogether refrain from violence. Younger than herself by many years, he married her as the easiest mode of settling his gambling debts;—married her with a loathing sense of her own previous dishonour, which he has not the wisdom or generosity to conceal. Whenever his temper becomes aggravated by excess, he

reproaches her with her former stains of character—with the slights still thrown upon her by the disdain of such women as the Duchess of Lisborough and Lady Grayfield ;—and even insults her with his comments on those ravages which the approach of age begins to render visible upon her person.”

“How unmanly !—what a brutal wretch !”

“Brutal indeed ! for he married her under a full consciousness of all she was, and all she had been ; and solely from pecuniary temptations.”

“And she avenges every injury she receives from Sir Cæsar, upon poor Lucy ?”

“Oh ! no ; when she is suffering from similar domestic humiliations, she flies to *her* to unburden her murmurs, and profit by her sympathy. It is in those intervals when Lady Wroxton is triumphant—when she is partially sunned in the favour of the world—and overlooked by her husband’s endurance, that her hard heart recovers itself to pour molten tor-

ments upon the head of her miserable associate."

"But why does Lady——by what name, dear Lady Robert, am I to designate her?"

"Mrs. Tichborne;—her *family* name, you know, is the allotment of the law; and one that proves, at times, a cruel remembrancer."

"Why does Mrs. Tichborne allow this mischievous Lady Wroxton to *remain* her associate?"

"Why does the famished wretch appease his pangs with any filthy morsel flung upon his path? We—Eleanor!—*we* who have never known the desolation of solitary hours—of solitary hours, too, imbittered by remorse—can very little imagine the eagerness with which a person who has listened, for days, to the ticking of a clock, or the beating of her own heart, turns to the cheering sound of human voices—to the aspect of a familiar face. But Lady Wroxton is well aware of this; for she has long witnessed and calculated upon the effects of her

arrival at Lucy's sordid dwelling ; and it is by her accurate knowledge of her own importance to the degraded sufferer, that she measures her powers of persecution."

" Alas !—alas !—for the virtues of our sex !"

" Could you but observe the air of superiority—the air of patronage she assumes with that fallen and penitent creature !—the insulting importance with which she invests the grant of her continued notice."

" Well may you commiserate poor Mrs. Tichborne's destiny !"

" Would, my dear Claudia—would to heaven that Lady Wroxton's insolence were its worst aggravation !—but I have not yet said a single word of the real source of those floods of anguish which are undermining Lucy's existence, and conveying her to her grave.—*Her children !*"

" There indeed her deprivations are terrible ! Of course she has not seen them for years—not since the period of her disgrace?"

“I will not say that she has not *seen* them ;—for she has followed their footsteps and their equipage through every vicissitude of weather—she has watched for their comings and goings amid beggars at her husband’s gate—solely for the torturing delight of looking upon those beloved faces !—Think of such a position !—think of a mother who watched over the infancy of her offspring with all the doting of womanly tenderness—who noted every dawning change—every growing beauty—numbered the very hairs of each little head—and could calculate on every varying feeling of each little heart ;—think of a mother so devoted, having condemned herself to gaze trembling with shame upon their alienated countenances, without daring to breathe aloud the accents of tenderness smothering within her bosom !”

The tears were pouring down Lady Robert Lorton’s cheeks as she spoke ; and even the Miss Willinghams were affected by the picture of wretchedness she had drawn.

“It is indeed an awful retribution,” observed Eleanor, after a pause.

“I should have told you,” resumed Lady Robert in a broken voice—“I should have told you, but that I trust the charity of your own hearts has suggested it, that Lucy Tichborne is a sincere penitent;—that it is not the desertion of her lover, nor the scorn of the world, but an inward sense of her crime which has retained her in the humblest seclusion, and preyed upon her health. I do not believe that among the most pharisaical congregations of the godly, there abides so contrite, so true, so pure a Christian! Notwithstanding her profound reliance on the divine sentence of mercy upon the sinner of gospel commemoration, whose frailties resembled her own, she has never presumed to shake from her head the dust and ashes of humiliation. Yet upon this crushed worm do they seek to trample!”

“*They?*—to whom can you possibly allude?”

“To the Duchess and her tribe;—to the Grayfields and Barringhursts.”

“But what interests have they in common? What contact can afford them an opportunity for insult?”

“I have told you that she is dying;—her very days are numbered;—a deep decline will shortly consign her to the judgment of a more merciful tribunal than any she has yet encountered. For her own miserable part, she exults in the coming change, and looks to the grave for that peace beyond all understanding which she has so long forfeited;—for mine—I cannot but feel that she has accomplished, and worthily accomplished her trial, and that the reward of her patience awaits her.”

“And is her condition altogether hopeless?”

“So her physicians have pronounced it; and one only earthly care appears to ruffle the composure of her mind. She fancies she could die in the utmost resignation, might she but be

permitted for once—for once only, for the last time—and in the presence of witnesses, to speak to her daughters. *She* knows—alas! none better—the dangers by which their path will be beset;—*she* knows the toils and snares which encompass the footsteps of youthful loveliness;—she wishes to warn them of their peril by the acknowledgment of their mother's error—by the spectacle of their mother's anguish; she seeks but to breathe upon them the intense sighs of a mother's love—and then lie down and die.”

“And who—*who* can wish to withhold so blameless a consolation?”

“My dear Eleanor—I have pleaded, besought, nay! almost knelt to Lady Barrington for her sanction. At one time I hoped I had prevailed over her rigid sanctity to accord my prayers; but Lady Grayfield interfered, and the young Duchess expressed herself with such abhorrent detestation of a sinner of Lucy's caste, that once more she hardened her heart;—

and they persist in dragging about those gentle-hearted girls to balls, and fêtes, and water-parties—in utter ignorance that their wretched mother is on the brink of the grave, and sorrowing in brokenness of heart over their estrangement.”

“There is something naturally pensive in their air and countenance; lovely as they are, the Miss Barringhursts do not appear happy.”

“How should they? Ever since their father’s remarriage, Lady Barringhurst’s daily lessons of propriety have been exemplified by references to their poor mother’s disgrace; they are perpetually reminded that the ill opinion of the world has been fastened upon their name by Lucy’s misconduct; and that it is equally their duty to detest and despise the woman whom they remember only as ministering to all their youthful pleasures, smoothing their little pillows in sickness, and comforting them under Miss Darnham’s severity;—and, by the most chilling

severity of demeanour, to display to the world their own moral superiority."

"Poor girls! Lady Barringhurst does not appear to be of a very conciliatory disposition."

"I am less indignant against *her*, however, than against Charlotte and Anastasia; for *her* situation is one of great delicacy, while *their* interference is wholly uncalled for. The whole three pass their Sunday mornings in running after fashionable preachers at the Lock or Hatton-garden, and their Sunday evenings at some concert or conversazione; yet, when I venture to resume this afflicting subject, pleading the cause of the fallen and the penitent, they put on their staunchest airs of orthodoxy—overwhelm me with texts—and tell me that the Miss Barringhursts cannot touch pitch without being defiled!—As if contagion could exist in the bitter tears of a contrite sinner—of a dying mother!"

The sympathy expressed by the Miss Wil-

linghams was now arrested by their arrival in Grosvenor-square, and by the formalities of introduction necessary between Mary and Lady Robert Lorton.

CHAPTER VI.

But loveliest things have mercy shown
To every frailty but their own,
And every woe a tear can claim
Except an erring sister's shame.

Scott.

To the great surprise of the Miss Willinghams, they found their sister established in the drawing-room in Grosvenor-square, and apparently engaged in confidential and affectionate intercourse with Mary. They had long and satisfactorily marked the disunion existing between the two; and had been very little inclined to see a better understanding prevail; for notwithstanding the improvement which

they acknowledged to be visible in the air and address of Sir Joseph's daughter, she was still simply and chastely elegant, without aspiring to those distinctions of fashion which they were ambitious to render the portion of Miss De Vesce; and moreover she was still, as she had ever been, what they were pleased to term "*too good*" for the ordinary style of society in the London world.

While Lady Robert therefore was engaged in breaking the ice of Mary's natural reserve, and in attempting to interest her in the history and hopes of the dying Lucy, Claudia and Eleanor busied themselves with labouring to discover the motive of their sister's unpremeditated visit to Grosvenor-square.

"When we left home, Minnie, I understood from Mamma that you intended refreshing yourself, after your Ebury fatigues, by a quiet morning with her. How came you to change your mind? Was Lady Maria afflicted with a fit of

nervousness—or rheumatism—or ill-humour?—either of which contingences suffices to render even the boudoir in Portman-square a Hall of Eblis !”

“Mamma was in her usual health and spirits, but *I* was not;—it was my own ill-humour which drove me forth to seek consolation from my cousin Mary.”

“And you appear to have found it; for I can discover no present trace of affliction upon your countenance.”

“Oh ! I was not afflicted—only cross. That very impertinent Monsieur de Béthizy, in spite of the porter’s denial, thought proper to force himself upon us for a morning visit; and having made good his entry, with a most officious affectation of anxiety to inquire after our health, he saw your guitar lying on the music-rack; and without informing himself whether we were tunefully inclined—which I, for one of the party, certainly was not—he favoured us with

aria after aria, romance after romance, in hopes, I suppose, by giving us excess of this food of love, that

Surfeiting,
The appetite might sicken, and so die."

"And did he appear a good musician?"

"An exquisite one!—his performance was as excellent as it was inopportune."

"This is a new conquest of yours, Minnie. Monsieur de Béthizy has certainly fallen desperately in love with you."

"So he took some pains to make me understand and believe. But I was forewarned against his pretensions; I was apprized that '*les beaux yeux de ma cassette*' would prove very attractive in his; and I was therefore proof against his elegant flatteries, which I must needs acknowledge to have been very well turned."

"Oh! this *menteur véridique* is an extremely plausible and pleasant person; well-bred, and original, and accomplished: it is really a pity that he cannot afford to be sincere in his attach-

ments;—but then there is nothing you know so ruinously expensive as disinterested love.”

“ It is perhaps easy to be candid with regard to Monsieur de Béthizy’s merits, and to beware of his cupidity, when it addresses itself to other people. But had you been in *my* place—had you found yourself exposed to his vexatious attempts—you too would have waxed wroth against his intrusion. In short, finding that he had established himself with us for the remainder of the morning, I ordered the carriage with as ungracious an air as I could assume, and came hither.”

“ And have you learned any thing from Mary,” inquired Eleanor with a very significant look, “ concerning the poor Lorimers, and their affairs?—She is so much in Lady Wyndham’s confidence, and so much attached to that dear old stay-at-home tortoise, Lady Lorimer, that she is probably *au fait* to all their politics.”

“ What politics can agitate a family which has just been bereaved of its father and pro-

tector?—Lord Lorimer was very far from an interesting or an amiable member of society; but his kind good wife will not the less lament the companion of her long and enduring existence.”

“And the present Lord Lorimer—is he shortly expected home?” inquired Eleanor, looking somewhat ashamed of her own flippancy.

“My cousin Charles has written to require his immediate return to England; more—neither his family, nor Mary, nor myself, can know or guess upon the subject. And you, sisters, have you had a pleasant morning?”

“Delightful! the gallery was not too crowded—but several of our intimate friends accidentally joined our party.”

“We have been so gay—” Claudia began, but her words were checked by the sound of sobs from the extremity of the room where Mary and Lady Robert Lorton had been sitting engrossed in earnest conversation.

On the entrance of her visitors Mary Wilingham had been very ill-prepared for any painful appeal to her feelings. She had received during the preceding hour from Miss De Vesci, intelligence which had flushed her pensive cheek with joy, and irradiated her mild blue eyes with a very unusual air of triumph. She had been clasped in the arms of her own dear Minnie—her former nursling—her former pupil—her future friend—with a degree of fervent affection such as had long ceased to be demonstrated between them; and which now owed its renewal or acknowledgment to explanations not the less welcome or the less precious that they arose from accidental causes. It was some time since Mary had felt so happy, so much in accord with the world, so charitably inclined to believe that it contained a large majority of the happy and the good; when, just at this auspicious crisis of her universal philanthropy, Lady Robert Lorton's recital of sorrow, and suffering, and human severity, burst

upon her heart with an obscuring train of clouds and storms. She could not choose but weep—even in the struggle between the sense of her personal happiness, and of the agonizing repentance of the dying Lady Barringhurst.

Miss De Vesci rose, on the first sound of her distressing emotion, and would have advanced towards her.

“Leave her to herself, Minnie,” observed Eleanor, placing a detaining hand on her arm. “Nothing particular has occurred; Mary is only goodnaturedly agitated by a sad history which Lady Robert has been recounting.”

But Miss De Vesci was inclined to follow the prompting of her own heart, rather than that of her sister’s ceremonious good-breeding; in a moment she was by Mary’s side;—in another, she was folded in her arms. While her sisters affected to busy themselves with a frame of beautiful embroidery which was standing on an adjoining table in evidence of their cousin’s industrious morning, Miss De Vesci

was admitted to her share of Lady Robert's amiable anxieties, and of Mary's sympathy.

But Mary Willingham did not limit that sympathy to a mere indulgence of verbal exaggeration. She undertook to visit Lady Barringhurst, with whom she still remained on terms of friendly intimacy, that very evening; she undertook to plead and to persuade with patient eloquence; but more she could not promise; she acknowledged her friend Milicent to be one of the gnat-strainers of the earth.

"I do not remember that she was formerly so strictly severe in her doctrines," observed Miss Willingham; "but I fancy she feels called upon, by the peculiar circumstances attending her elevation, to practise and display a more than ordinary portion of rigid virtue."

"Say rather of spiritual pride," interrupted Minnie De Vesci. "Milicent was always vain, and cold, and heartless: well do I recollect, dearest Mary, with what reluctance of self-

love she used to receive those instructions of yours which she knew were essential to her power of gaining her daily bread, and that of her parents. And now—finding herself inferior to such persons as Lady Robert, and Lady Rachel Verney, and Lady Cosmo Somerset, in birth, beauty, and accomplishments—she attempts to assume and maintain a supereminence over their heads by affecting this unchristian pride of holiness.”

“Minnie—Minnie!” exclaimed her cousin, in a tone of reprehension.

Lady Robert smiled. “I fear Miss De Vesci’s strictures are no less just than severe.”

“Possibly—but so strict a measure of justice entails a terrible responsibility on ourselves; we are told that ‘with that measure we mete, it shall be measured to us withal.’”

“I will allow *you*,” said Lady Robert, kindly taking her hand, “to reprove me by a text; for yours is a womanly and a Christian heart—as humble as it is tender. I have not, however,

yet replied to your amiable proposal of accompanying me to the House of Mourning."

"And mine, dear Lady Robert," whispered Miss De Vesci;—"will you not include me in a work of mercy?"

"I will include neither of you, on this occasion," said Lady Robert Lorton, smiling upon them both. "You—unmarried, and young—and pure in name and fame, might be injured were the world to know of your contact with one of the victims, poisoned even unto death by its pestilent and infectious breath;—nor has Lucy any claims upon *you* to warrant the hazard. You are not the children of her bosom, and therefore cannot impart the balm that wounded bosom needs so much;—*you* have not been her friend—her companion in the paths of levity and folly, as *I* have; and you are not called upon to expiate any former deficiency of friendly warning and admonition, as *I* am. No—no! go to Lady Barringhurst!—prevail with *her*—induce her to obtain her lord's sanc-

tion to my plan. Vouchsafe to my unhappy Lucy the consolation of blessing her daughters before she dies ;—and *I* will bless *you* for your generous interposition.”

All further discussion of the subject was now prevented by the entrance of Mr. Willingham—who, seeing Miss De Vesci’s carriage at the door, had been induced to intrude among his sister’s morning-visitors ; a circumstance of rare occurrence with one of such busy occupations, and so reserved a disposition. He appeared surprised by the traces of emotion still visible on the countenances of Lady Robert and her young friends ; but having been engaged himself, during the whole of the morning, in the melancholy task of assisting his neighbour, Sir William Wyndham, in a temporary arrangement of the affairs of the late Lord Lorimer, he referred the sadness of their air to their sympathy with his widow ; with whom they were on terms of intimate friendship, and who was a woman commanding the general respect and affection

of all within the limited circle of her acquaintance.

Claudia and Eleanor, however, who had long accustomed themselves to regard any outward demonstration of affliction as a gross act of moral indecorum, were shocked that Lady Robert should be detected with red eyes, or Minnie with quivering lips. They officiously interrupted Charles Willingham's approach towards the depressed group, by assailing him with a thousand idle questions, and ironical compliments; and while he was still parrying the attack with equal good-humour and good-breeding, Sir Joseph himself ceremoniously bowed his way into the room.

With the usual frivolity of idle curiosity distinguishing his puerile turn of mind—for his enrolment in the Royal Societies and Institutions—Linnæan, and Horticultural, and Zoological—Antiquarian, and Geological, and Phrenological—had tended only to knit his reverend brows into sterner gravity, without assisting to

furnish the vacant chambers beneath—had prompted him to ascertain that his nieces were in the drawing-room, as a motive for the unusual exertion of his son's appearance there ; and he had immediately resolved to acquaint himself by ocular certainty, which of the three fair cousins had formed an attraction to Mr. Willingham's assiduities. He was provoked beyond measure, on finding him smiled upon by the handsome Claudia, and engaged in lively repartee with the animated Eleanor ; while Miss De Vesci—the heiress—who could, would, should, or might have been from her very cradle his own especial property, was standing aloof, hand in hand with Mary, at the further extremity of the room !

On this point, indeed, Sir Joseph Willingham was sensitively conscious of having defeated himself ; and, like other persons sore under the recollection of a blunder, he took refuge under a self-assurance of ill-usage. He chose to feel that he had been defrauded

out of Bensleigh Park and ten thousand a-year for his son;—first, by the lawless interposition of Lord Stapylford, and lastly, by the unwarrantable interference of Mr. Lorimer: and having now no better source of sympathy for his disappointment, he frequently sought to disengage his leathern heart of its store of bitterness, by discussing with poor, palsied old Lady Monteagle, his ancient neighbour and ally, the rapacity of the Lorimer family, and the inexplicable mysteries attending the position of Miss De Vesci's affairs.

From a cabinet-council of this description, he had just returned in time to increase the dissatisfaction it had engendered, by the spectacle of an apparent intimacy between his portionless elder nieces and his promising son; and all the Dowager's malevolent suggestions touching the ingratitude of Lady Maria Willingham, and the successful manœuvres of that crafty tribe—those thriving Lorimers—were as nothing compared with the horrible attestation

before him of a new conspiracy hatching against his peace. He was scarcely mollified by the graciousness with which Lady Robert Lorton solicited an introduction; he entertained, it is true, a most inordinate degree of respect towards a Duchess presumptive; but his son—his only son!—He trembled to think of Charles's danger; and did not entirely recover his self-possession till the equipage containing the three fatal sisters—whom he began to regard as Mr. Willingham's destinies—rolled from the door. Even then, his equanimity was of a very doubtful character; he was exceedingly glad to have disencumbered himself of temptresses so perilous to the future welfare of his family; but he could not resist the promptings of his vexation with sufficient fortitude to refrain from tormenting his son and daughter, during the whole of dinner-time, with diatribes against the rapacity of the Lorimers, and the affectation, folly, and insincerity of Lady Maria and her united offspring. And if Charles and Mary were too

devotedly respectful in filial deference to, take up the vindication of their absent friends, they were unrewarded by the slightest measure of compunctious forbearance on the part of the indignant Sir Joseph.

The Miss Willinghams and Minnie, meanwhile, on their return to Portman-square—wholly unconscious of the vituperation thus lavished upon them—were destined to hear of another morning visitor, equally unexpected and scarcely more welcome than the importunate Monsieur de Béthizy. Lady Radbourne had been sitting with their mother in all the friendly cordiality of extreme intimacy; but, although she had a scapegrace son at full years of *in-discretion*, and already sinking beneath the ponderous honours of a cornet's helmet, neither Claudia nor Eleanor were tempted to attribute her dawning graciousness to any matrimonial views upon the heiress of Bensleigh. They were far better inclined to believe and fear that she was eager to ascertain the

exact state and progress of their connexion with Lord Basingstoke, against whom she evidently purposed directing her harpoon in favour of her own daughter; as well as to weaken the strength of that by which they were bound to Lady Robert Lorton and her society.

Lady Radbourne was, in fact, most tenaciously covetous of attaching to her train every person likely to attract the notice and favour of the great world. But even this absorbent avarice of partisanship was feeble by comparison with the intensity of her eagerness to thwart, and mortify, and torment Lady Robert Lorton—the only person who had ventured to oppose her own tortuous and clumsy march towards popularity. It was Lady Radbourne who secretly, but unintermittingly, stirred up the dregs of bitterness subsisting between the Duchess and Lady Grayfield, and their unsuspecting sister-in-law; she it was who—by a dexterous support of Mr. Tichborne in society—by constant insinuations of the

serious injury it had proved to so young a man to become entangled by Lady Barringhurst's licentious arts—contrived to refresh the odium shed over the character and conduct of the degraded Lucy;—she it was who strengthened the perverse righteousness of the virtuous Millicent into all its obstinacy of cruelty;—and now her projects and malicious forecast were finally directed towards insuring the defection of the Willingham family, whom she intended to cajole into withdrawing their friendship from the detested Lady Robert; while she sily robbed them, in her turn, of the devotion of Lord Basingstoke. Lady Radbourne dearly loved a stratagem; and this double intrigue gave a poignant zest to the graciousness of her attack upon the politeness of Lady Maria Willingham.

Both in her Ladyship and in her elder daughters, however, Lady Radbourne was destined to encounter a gift of worldly subtlety equal to her own;—the Willinghams were not of the number of those whom the serpent could be-

guile !—They were satisfied to accept the invitations of the new Empress of the West—to eat her dinners, dance at her balls, flirt with her son, or affect a sentimental friendship for her vapid daughters. But they maintained their own reserve of cunning throughout the whole affair;—and whatsoever queen might reign—whether Lady Radbourne or Lady Robert—Claudia was as stoutly determined as the Vicar of Bray, to retain her self-appropriated honours as the future Marchioness of Lancaster.

CHAPTER VII.

For marriage is a matter of more worth ;
Than to be dealt with by attorneyship.

Shakspeare.

MONSIEUR DE BETHIZY had been perfectly conscious of the motives of Miss De Vesci's ungracious reception of his visit ; but it was not his cue to take umbrage at this early discouragement. He was well aware of the difference existing between the matrimonial arrangements of England and France. He was well aware that instead of sending his mother, the Countess—or his aunt, the Duchess—as an Ambassadress to Lady Maria Willingham, in order to display his hereditary parchments, the rent-roll of his estates, and—after requiring a

view of Miss De Vesci's in return—to bargain and wrangle touching the value of the diamonds to be presented, and the amount of pin-money to be apportioned to the bride—he should be required to waste his valuable time and address upon all the delicacies of circumlocution; to endure a thousand caprices—and devote, for the first time in his life, to a young lady, those *petits soins* and eager attentions, which had been, for many years, at the service of every married woman of distinction in the Chaussée d'Antin.

All this unnecessary labour of courtship he regarded as extremely importunate, and somewhat indelicate—as a work of supererogation in every possible point of view. But Bézithy was a well-bred man, and piqued himself upon an intimate version in *les usages* of every country in which he condescended to sojourn. England he knew to be remarkable for the length and solemnity of its antenuptial wooings; and as an heiress must necessarily be

entitled to a double portion of such distinctions, he resolved to lend himself, with a good grace, to the sentimental mummary exacted by national custom. Indeed, from the moment of his actual introduction to Miss De Vesci—from the moment he had found occasion to recognise her extreme loveliness, and unexpected elegance of air and address, he had felt his forthcoming task to be far less irksome than he had at first apprehended. He still regretted that one of her elder sisters, who were so much her superiors in tact and knowledge of the world, had not proved the heiress, instead of herself; but still he felt that he should not be *very* much ashamed of producing Minnie at Paris as Madame la Comtesse de Béthizy. If less *distinguée* by fashionable effrontery than he could wish, the guineas of her dowry would serve to gild over a multitude of sins.

With respect to eventual acceptance, he never, for a moment, entertained a doubt upon the subject. He had been too much flattered

by the world—too successful among the fairer moiety of its communities—to be at all uncertain as to the extent of his own powers of pleasing. He had his intervals of *maussaderie* and *brusquerie*, could be out of humour, and out of spirits, like other men; but when and where he deigned to lend himself seriously to the task of captivation, his success was unlimited. As to Miss De Vesci—*pauvre petite!*—he intended to be very indulgent and forbearing towards one so little versed in the habits of good society; he would grant her till the end of the season to make the most of her power, and plume herself on her liberty—but after July, the time for trifling would be at an end; and she must prepare herself to resign the sceptre, and accompany him back to Paris.

If Charles Willingham could have been aware of the extent of his views, or have listened to the overflowings of his impertinence, it is probable that a brace of hair-triggers and Chalk Farm would have put a conclusive period to

his speculations. But Béthizy had too much tact not to display a perfect discretion in the selection of his audience. He sometimes condescended to electrify Lady Radbourne with a disclosure of his views and principles; for he saw that this foolish devotee of fashion was wonderfully fascinated by his cool, easy affectation of general superiority; and was eager to receive his dictatorial opinions as the true oracles of the false altar she adored; and he was on terms of affectionate intimacy with Henry Tichborne, who, although ejected from Lady Robert Lorton's society, and frowned upon by the Lisboroughs and Grayfields, was still of high account among the general circles of the great world;—an important personage at all the fashionable clubs—an idol at Crockford's, and an autocrat at Newmarket. From Tichborne, indeed, Monsieur de Béthizy had received his first valuable intelligence respecting Miss De Vesci and her appertainments; and the crafty heir-leech was the more eager in

urging him to the pursuit, inasmuch as an old *Salon* account still remained unsettled between them, which he trusted would be adjusted *unexamined* amid the lavish hurry of a brilliant match with an English heiress.

“ But my dear fellow,” said B  thizy to his congenial friend, as he sat lounging on the sofa of Tichborne’s superfection of a bachelor’s residence in one of the most recondite by-ways of classical May Fair, “ surely there are more forms to be observed in this laborious undertaking than you have yet explained ? To call every morning in Portman-square—(having bribed the porter to become oblivious of any prohibitory admonition of ‘ not at home ’)—to sit making conversation or love, according to the number of persons who may chance to be in the room, till the carriage or the horses are announced—to beset Miss De Vesci’s barouche in Park-lane with one of Colvill’s choicest *bouquets*—to devote myself to Lady Maria and her *petite sant  *, while her elder daughters are

flirting and waltzing at their eternal balls—and to persuade poor little Minnie herself on the morrow that I have been standing with folded arms and rueful visage all night under her window, instead of supping at Crockford's—pray tell me—is this *all* I have to do?"

"And enough too, I should imagine," replied Tichborne, laughing at his vehemence; "when you include the necessity of riding the best and the best-groomed horse—wearing the best-made coat—smiling your most pearly smiles, and uttering your choicest witticisms, in order to maintain your reputation among the fashionable powers that be—and to overcome this pretty little country-girl by 'the magic of a name.'"

"It is precisely because she *is* pretty that my chivalrous gallantry suggests an excess of effort. Had she been as ugly as Hecate, I should have married her all the same; but with less *gaité de cœur*, and leaving all the labour of courtship to herself."

“Are you acquainted with her guardians?”

“I knew Lorimer at Paris;—an excellent fellow—not good-looking, but really deserving to be so. *Du reste bon enfant!*”

“But there is another; a Sir Westland Somebody—or Sir Somebody Westland;—one of our commercial upstarts—as rich as the Bank, and as vulgar as Oxford-street.”

“My dear Tichborne!—prithee present me. I adore a brute who is both vulgar and opulent; any qualification which enables one to despise a rich man insures one such a delicious personal triumph! Pray present me!”

“*Entre nous*, my dear Béthizy, I have very little vogue or currency myself among persons of the Westland stamp;—they have an instinctive detestation of younger brothers, and men with no better profession than that of gentlemanly leisure.”

Béthizy adjusted his cravat, knit his brows, and seemed uneasy.

“I once fell in with Sir Robert Westland in

the course of a money-lending transaction of Vallerhurst's or Stapylford's—I forget which. We intended to overreach Squaretoes, but found ourselves no match for his extortionary foresight. I remember he said some ugly things to us, which I endured far better than the consciousness of having been regularly *done* by a fellow in corduroys and top-boots; but as the old usurer probably remembers the transaction as well as I do, an introduction from *me* would only hurt your cause."

"I must get some one else to officiate as master of the ceremonies. *Voyons!*"

"*Voyons* indeed!—You have no conception of the difficulty of getting into those monied, dinner-giving, regular houses! All one's acquaintances are acquainted with Prince A—or the Duke of B.—Almack's and Parliament have their definitive and well-understood modes of entrance;—but who the deuce knows any thing about a parcel of ledgermen in Broadstreet or Great St. Helen's?—unless, as in the

present instance, one of them chances to boast the guardianship of a lovely heiress."

"That word renews my flagging enthusiasm! By the way that old general officer, with a padded chest and long-tailed pony, with whom Comyne Wallace is so fond of trotting round the drive—is not he a Sir Westland?"

"Your very man!—a stupid old block of *levée*-lumber, who will do your business to a turn!—Wallace will present you;—a 'Monsieur le Comte' will put him in mind of the Peninsula;—he will tell you a tough story or two about Almeida or Badajoz; by listening to which you will obtain an easy access to the house of his brother, or cousin, or nephew—the identical guardian of Miss De Vesci."

Mr. Tichborne's assurances were on this occasion prophetic; and so well did Monsieur de Béthizy bait his peninsular trap for poor Sir Hew Westland, by inquiring whether he were "the distinguished General Westland, of whom he had heard such frequent mention

from his cousin the Duc D'Albufera," that within a week from his presentation he found himself an invited guest in the vast mansion of the vast Sir Thomas, in the vast area of Portland-place!—an honour to which his original introducer, Sir Comyne Wallace, had never either aspired or been admitted.

But while Monsieur de Béthizy was congratulating himself upon his expert diplomacy, and preparing his toilet for a dinner-party, at which he had pre-assured himself of Miss De Vesci's presence—with all that elaboration of mother-of-pearl and gold—of *esprits*, *extraits*, *élixirs odontalgiques*, *pâtes*, and *sachets*, which had given to his dressing-box the reputation of being "*le nécessaire le mieux provisionné de l'Europe!*"—he had very little idea that he was himself the dupe of a manœuvre on the occasion. The Westlands were, perhaps, of all the persons interested in the state of the young heiress's engagements and affections, the most *profoundly* interested; for their own stake in

the chance of her future union with Lord Stapylford, actually amounted to the solid sum of £80,000 sterling. Yet they were also the most remote from every reasonable possibility of calculating upon the event ; with all her graciousness and gentle affability she entertained so little real familiarity with the several ladies of the family, that it would have been utterly beyond their powers of daring to make a direct attack upon her confidence.

Now the whole tribe of Westland were aware—Sir Hew having triumphantly proclaimed the fact, which the young Parisian was far from dilatory in confirming—that Monsieur de Béthizy was an intimate acquaintance of Miss De Vesci's, and a frequent morning visitor in Portman-square. It occurred to them, for they were not very accurately versed in the nationalities of foreign titles, that he was an old Neapolitan friend ; and that he might possibly have made himself master, by personal observation, of the secret they were so anxious to

appropriate. Their object, therefore, in inviting him to dinner was a settled purpose of cross-examination during the intervals of their sour claret; and while his own intentions had arranged a premature escape to the ladies and the coffee, theirs had concocted a project "to put an enemy into his mouth to steal away his brains;" and, during their absence, to pry into the mysteries of the young heiress's affections!

Great, indeed, was Miss De Vesci's astonishment, on witnessing Monsieur de Béthizy's affectedly easy entrance into the dining-room in Portland-place, towards the conclusion of the first course; but she had now been so repeatedly startled by his appearance in her own house, in spite of her prohibitions, and on occasions and at hours the most incongruous, that she began to regard him as a sort of inevitable Mephistopheles attached to her steps;—or rather, for there was very little that was either tragical or repulsive in his frank air and handsome person, as the Monsieur Nongtonpaw

universally greeting the appearance of "the great traveller, Bull."

Having heard so much from her sisters of the fastidiousness of Parisian judgment respecting the customs, dress, diet, and demeanour, of the Hottentots of Great Britain, Minnie, who had a great aptitude for being amused, promised herself some diversion in watching the effect of the society gathered around her, upon the susceptible nerves of Monsieur de Béthizy;—she expected to see his politeness cruelly taxed in disguising his astonishment. But in this anticipation she was utterly disappointed. By far the most offensive and most ill-bred class of English mediocrities, is to be met with in the cafés of Paris, and the arcades of the Palais Royal; their own countrymen, indeed, would feel puzzled to assign a character and degree to their coarse and insolent vulgarity. Monsieur de Béthizy had "supped full of horrors" of this description; and having always heard them defined by the exclusives as belonging to the com-

mercial class, his own surprise at Sir Thomas Westland's table arose from seeing an assembly of civilized beings, who neither drank their Champagne out of tumblers, nor accompanied all their observations with an oath. By comparison with his anticipations, he thought them remarkably well-bred, agreeable persons ; most of them, in virtue of their foreign mercantile associations, speaking remarkably good French, and all apparently courteously disposed towards the man on whose incontinence of tongue their foresight had calculated so largely. A certain joviality in their manners reminded him, too, of the light-heartedness of his own countrymen ; his limited acquaintance with the English language prevented his perceiving that this super-animation was "full of sound and laughter—signifying nothing!"—and essentially different from the witty piquancy of foreign gaiety.

There was another circumstance which operated upon Monsieur de Béthizy's pre-

judices in their favour, far beyond Minnie's conceptions. There was a comfortable air of opulence, a general evidence of plenty shed around the establishment, which is peculiarly prepossessing to a Frenchman of narrow or embarrassed fortunes. The profusion of plate and other rich accessories, the blaze of lights, the train of liveried attendants, the inordinate display of diamonds affected by the female guests, and the vast variety of rich wines produced upon the board, struck him with feelings of general respect towards the Westland family, and more than compensated for any deficiency of refinement visible in their arrangements. He even began to think less deferentially of Minnie and of her fortunes in the midst of so much splendour; he was persuaded that the clan by which he was now surrounded, could furnish half a dozen heiresses for his selection;—heiresses, too, upon whom the name of *Comtesse* would operate as a far more prepossessing charm than upon the daughter of Lady Maria

Willingham. His worthy host—among the rest—could boast a Miss Arabella of his own, who had only one vulgar, red-handed, black-haired, dressy, noisy brother, to share with her the rich proceeds of his establishment in Lombard-street; and the importance of his city position as an East India Director.

It is surprising to observe the superfluous pains with which the mole-eyed mortals of the earth, labour towards the accomplishment of an end which courts them, ready manufactured by the common chances of society. In this latter capacity of India Director, Sir Robert Westland was in unregarded possession of sources of information, which might have aptly superseded all his designs upon Monsieur de Béthizy, and all his misdoubtings touching the eventual distribution of General De Vesci's property. Nearly opposite to Minnie, at the gorgeous board, and only severed from her observation by the glittering arabesques of an epergne, apparently framed for the ærial elevation of

mangoes, limes, pickled ginger, and other Oriental condiments, there sat a middle-aged gentleman, with a visage as yellow as the ginger, and as sour as the mangoes;—with wasted hands half covered by a singular prolongation of Irish linen;—a meagre head, scantily shaded with lank, unwholesome hair;—smelling pungently of camphor, and looking as though the bilious vital stream oozed rather than circulated through his languid veins.

Miss De Vesci, to whom all these external evidences had been rendered familiar by her residence in the mansion of her uncle, the ex-governor—instantly recognised one of the latest human consignments of the East India Fleet! Long before she had caught the sound of “Presidency — “Governor-general” — “Council” — “Hookahbadar” — “Bungalow” — “Kedgerree” — “Tiffin” — “Elephanteradabad” — and “eighteen hundred miles up the country” — she had decided her opposite neighbour to have left the Downs the preceding day, and the Hooghly

some four or five months. From that moment Monsieur de Béthizy, on her right hand, uttered his pleasantries in vain ; and her heavy pompous guardian, on her left, inquired three times unanswered, whether she had been “ *riding* in the carriage all the morning ? ” and whether he should “ help her to some *sparrow-grass* ? ”

Sir Richard at length waxing wroth at her silence, decided that she was pre-engrossed by that chattering, jabbering, mountebank of a Frenchman on the other side ; and the mountebank of a Frenchman decided, at the same time, that she was afflicted by an heiress-fit of caprice ; but neither of them conjectured that eye, and ear, and heart, were anchored upon the yellow, semi-existent Nabob, who was bestowing his Oriental intelligence on the careless ears of Miss Arabella Westland.

The East India Director indeed, who was arithmetically versed in the merits of his jaundiced guest, had purposely insured this auspicious propinquity to his own daughter ; whose

full-blown charms, and raiment of divers colours, might, he conceived, operate favourably upon one whose observation had been recently confined to the swarthy visages of Lascars, and the listless languor of the Calcutta belles. He had very little suspicion how much Miss Belle herself would have preferred the neighbourhood of Béthizy's laughing eyes, and sapphire studs; or how infinitely delighted the heiress of Bensleigh would have found herself, by an occasion of inquiry into all the *on dits* of the Eastern world!—She listened, however, with untiring patience even to the remote echoes of Mr. Muddiford's eloquence; being satisfied, by former experience, that instead of attempting to acquaint himself with any of the important changes and public events of recent occurrence in Europe, the yellow Nabob would continue to recount and re-recount the inane and uninteresting events of a quarter of the world in which no person present but himself was likely to be interested.

At length her philosophic and longsuffering patience was rewarded;—the names of Lord and Lady Melrose—and of Lord Stapylford—greeted her ears. Connected with what extraneous information, or tending to what elucidations I shall not take upon me to say; having no reason to suppose they would prove of higher account in the estimation of the public in general, than in that of Miss Arabella Westland; who most unforbearingly jingled her ice-spoon throughout the whole communication, and deigned not to bestow upon its prosy minister a single moment's attention.

On Minnie De Vesci, however, the effect was instantaneous—entrancing—bewildering! Whatever the character of the intelligence thus involving the name of her lover, it brought a flush of rapture to her cheek; and to her eyes a stream of radiant emanations. From that moment Monsieur de Béthizy persuaded him that the “heirss-fit of caprice” had turned the current of its tide—and all in his own

favour. The fair lady of Bensleigh, in the excitement of her joy, was as ready to laugh with him—to flirt, or dance, or sing—as either of her sisters, or any of the Westland young ladies.

In the course of the evening the stock of Sir Robert Westland's calculations on the Staphylford marriage-forfeiture, had fallen two and a half per cent. on the strength of a French romance, sung in parts with excellent skill and feeling—by Miss De Vesci and Monsieur de Béthizy !

CHAPTER VIII.

Go ! let me weep—there's bliss in tears
When he who sheds them inly feels
Each lingering stain of early years
Effaced by every drop that steals.

The fruitless showers of earthly woe
Fall dark to earth, and never rise,
While tears that from repentance flow
In bright exhalation reach the skies !

Moore.

It was on one of those balmy summer-days when sorrow appears to have forsaken her habitation upon the earth ; when fruits and flowers, scattered in lavish prodigality around, seem to renew the season in which heaven first showered its bountiful gifts upon the graceless rebels of its creation ;—when the very air we

breathe is preciouslly endowed—and the sky on which we gaze is brightly enriched with resplendent promises of happiness—that Lady Robert Lorton dejectedly ascended the narrow staircase of an obscure retreat in the neighbourhood of Kensington—entered a darkened chamber—and seated herself beside a sofa, on which reclined the wasted and languid figure of the once lovely Lady Barringhurst.

“What a beautiful morning!—did you come direct from home?” inquired Lucy, extending her attenuated hand towards her visitor, and bending upon her face one of those eager looks of sickly anxiety which Lady Robert could but too well interpret.

“I did!”—she replied; for she had no courage to reply to the *mute* interrogation of the sufferer.

“I thought the loveliness of the weather might perhaps tempt you to drive through the King’s Road—or——”

“I walked through Kensington Gardens, my

dear Lucy, with my children ; and the carriage met me at the Palace gate."

" Ah ! then I see how it is !" said the invalid, clasping her hands mournfully together. " You have failed in your application ; if you had any good news to communicate, you would not have delayed on the road."

" My dear Lucy—my dearest friend——"

" No ! no !—I know the kindness of your disposition too well to deceive myself. My last chance is over—or you would have flown instantly hither to bring me the glad tidings of peace."

" I will own to you that I have prospered ill with Lady Grayfield and Anastasia ;—that they are rather inclined to strengthen Lady Barringhurst's obduracy than to forward our views. Still I do not despair ; I have insured the assistance of a person both able and willing to serve you—of one whose influence with this harsh woman has its origin in important obligations."

Lucy waved her head despairingly.

“ But I have another source of consolation to offer you ;—I have seen your girls—have conversed with them.”

The invalid half raised herself from her pillow, and without pronouncing a syllable, fixed the grasp of her long thin hand on Lady Robert’s arm, and the piteous gaze of her eager eyes upon Lady Robert’s countenance.

“ They are charming !—gentle, graceful, and unspeakably feminine in their address. There is a sort of mournful charm about them ; as if the impulses of youth prompted them to be gay and happy, while the remembrance of their mother saddened them into calmness.”

“ My Lucy—my own sweet Lucy !” said the agitated mother. “ Does she then remember me so tenderly ?”

“ She does !—I am persuaded she does ! For although the scene of my introduction to them at Ebury was too public to allow me to venture upon any agitating explanation, yet

your eldest girl found an opportunity to whisper to me when a turn of the shrubbery concealed us for a moment from the observation of Lady Grayfield and her *protégée*, ‘ You are very kind, Lady Robert, thus to seek our acquaintance ; the notice of no other person could have flattered us half so much. My sister and myself have not forgotten the happy period of our childhood, nor your frequent presence in the dear home of our earlier days.’ ”

“ My sweet Lucy!—my poor little Georgiana!”

“ Not *little* now, love!—Both are taller than yourself; both handsome and distinguished-looking;—Lucy is the image of her mother.”

“ *Of her mother!* of the mother who disgraced her!” And the invalid sunk back upon her pillow, exhausted by emotion.

Lady Robert forbore to molest her by any interruption to the absorbing current of her reflections; but from time to time she silently wiped away the cold dew that gathered upon the deathlike forehead of her friend.

There was nothing bespeaking absolute poverty or privation in that little chamber;—but its limits were indeed narrow, and its furniture mean and faded, compared with the former high condition of its unhappy tenant. One female servant seemed to be her universal attendant; and her own appearance, although scrupulously and delicately neat, owed no adornment to the white wrapper of humblest materials in which she was enveloped. There was a character of parsimonious lowliness in every thing by which poor Lucy was surrounded, more touching perhaps to the feelings of the spectator than any symptoms of absolute want. In such an extremity the impulse of seeking to afford relief, is too strong to admit of the refinements of *mere* sympathy.

While poor Lucy lay thus absorbed in bitter rumination,

With hands upraised like one who prayed,

Lady Robert was startled by the sound of an

equipage driven abruptly to the door, and announced by a fashionable knock of the loudest and most peremptory kind; and on removing the curtain, she perceived the showy carriage of Lady Wroxton.

“Surely you are not well enough to see her?” she inquired of the invalid, who was trembling with nervous agitation.

“Indeed I am not!—Yet I hardly dare refuse myself to her—for she knows I never leave the house. Besides, she must have seen your carriage, and will perplex and grieve me by angry notes of remonstrance after her return to town. Lady Wroxton *has* been kind to me, and I should be sorry to irritate her.”

No further time was allowed for discussion; Lady Wroxton, with much audible panting and discomposure, was heard ascending the creaking staircase. In another moment the door was thrown open with an air of consternation by the maid-servant, and her Ladyship, arrayed

in all the most gorgeous pomp of fashion, languished into the room.

“Well—my dear soul—how are you?—Lady Robert, how do you find her to-day?”

“Low and nervous, as you may perceive: but I trust that quiet will restore her,” observed Lady Robert in significant reprehension of Lady Wroxton’s elevated voice, and fussy *entrée*.

“You really *must* exert yourself, Lucy,” said Lady W. in a still louder key, and throwing herself into a chair. “It is quite absurd to give way to all this hysteric nonsense. The weather is so fine, and the world so gay, that I consider it quite shocking—quite wicked to be out of spirits or discontented;—I do indeed, my dear.”

“Happy those who have no greater sin to task their repentance,” said Lucy in a low faint voice.

Lady Wroxton now drew off her gloves, clasped and unclasped her multitude of glittering bracelets, and betrayed, by a thousand

unnatural manœuvres the awkward consciousness of finding herself in the presence of one by whom she was despised, and had been slighted. She had too much experience of the world not to be fully aware that Lady Robert Lorton had determinately, although by moderate degrees, renounced her intimacy and dismissed her from all the familiarity of friendship; and feeling her own insufficiency of influence in society to meet these slights by open warfare, she contented herself, on any accidental meeting, by avenging her wrongs on the head of the helpless Lucy; or by the utterance of some flippant impertinence to Lady Robert, which generally recoiled on her own head, and gave pain to nobody but herself.

“What a little oven you have chosen for yourself here, Lucy; surely this close atmosphere cannot be good for an invalid!”

“Open the window for me,” said Lucy mildly to her better friend, who rose and obeyed with forbearing silence.

“It required the experience of this room,” continued Lady Wroxton not a whit abashed, “to persuade me that any place could be rendered hotter and more oppressive than the opera last night. To be sure Malibran was in charming voice, and afforded one some compensation ;—I really prefer her to Pasta !—What do you say, Lady Robert ?”

“Yes !—no !—any thing you please.”

“And you, Lucy ?”

“I have never heard her,” replied the sufferer, not venturing to remonstrate with Lady Wroxton’s levity.

“To be sure you have not !—I always forget that you lead the life of a recluse. But before the season is over, Lucy—when the town grows quite thin, you *must* come with me *incog.* and hear this new syren. You shall wear your bonnet, and sit at the back of the box, if you prefer it ;—I am sure it will amuse you and do you good.”

Lucy did not answer ; but Lady Robert per-

ceived that her breath grew short, and without observation, placed her vinaigrette in her hands.

“ By the way, my dear, your sweet girls were just opposite to me last night, with the Duchess of Lisborough. They were surrounded with men ; and unless I am very much mistaken, Lord Basingstoke was flirting desperately with the youngest.”

“ I think you *must* be very much mistaken,” said Lady Robert, attempting to screen the emotion of her friend, “ for Basingstoke was with me in Arlington-street the greater part of the evening.”

“ Well—well ! I trust I am !—He is not a very safe person for a girl to flirt with ; for he is a very general admirer—rides with Lady Clara Radbourne—practises the Mazurka with Claudia Willingham ;—so that a little *débutante*—a novice in the fashionable world like Miss Georgiana Barringhurst—would have very little probability of success, and a great chance of burning her fingers. Besides,” continued Lady

Wroxton, looking mysterious, "he is intimately linked with persons who do no credit to his taste; and who could not with propriety be tolerated by any friend or connexion of our dear Lucy's."

The helpless object of this unfeeling innuendo turned a look of painful inquiry towards Lady Robert;—but she dared not mention Mr. Tichborne's name; nor, in Lady Wroxton's scornful presence, would she even allude to that of her daughter.

"You have nothing to fear on such a point," replied Lady Robert Lorton, definitively. "I have every reason to believe that Lord Basingstoke has long devoted his serious attentions to Claudia Willingham."

"And have you really and truly credulity enough to suppose that even a young man so green and so silly as Lord Basingstoke—even the rawest boy from Eton or Harrow—could be taken in at this time of day by such a recognised establishment-hunter as one of the

Willinghams?—Impossible! my dear Lady Robert!—even *your* goodnatured partiality cannot blind you to the fact that those girls are the fable of the clubs—exposed to the sneers of all the boy-guardsmen, and college tigers.”

“Are they so much altered?—they were lovely girls but a very few years ago,” observed Lucy, to deprecate the angry reply she saw gathering on the lips of her friend.

“Altered?—they have not so much as the shadow of good looks remaining. They have exactly the faded, withered appearance of plants which one sees returning from their London *abonnement* to some nursery-ground;—all their bloom having been forced into premature existence for a temporary show, and blighted by the noisome atmosphere of habitual dissipation.”

Lady Wroxton rose as she spoke; and going towards the paltry looking-glass over the mantelpiece, whose tawdry lodginghouse-frame formed a margin doubling its reflective extent, began to arrange her jetty curls—a splendid

production of modern art—over the highly-rouged cheeks of her still-handsome countenance. “*Serious* attentions to Claudia Willingham!—no, no, my dear Lady Robert! you cannot for a moment indulge in such an absurd supposition!”

“I find myself daily and hourly compelled to believe in such singular incredibilities”—Lady Robert began;—but she instantly checked herself. She had just sufficient self-command to repress the bitter rejoinder which was rising to her lips; for she felt that any altercation with Lady Wroxton in Lucy’s presence, would tend only to agitate and distress the invalid.—Let those who know the verbal tendencies of feminine indignation appreciate and applaud her forbearance!

Lady Wroxton, however, was so little grateful for her moderation, that she scrupled not to provoke her disgust by an *insinuation* still more insolent—far—*far* more cruel; that Lord Basingstoke might possibly be induced to direct

his attentions to Miss Willingham, from a secret hesitation to enter on a matrimonial engagement with a girl under Georgiana Barringhurst's peculiar circumstances.

Lady Robert was horror-struck by this act of barbarity;—she could not pronounce a single word in refutation of an opinion which she was satisfied would convey a finishing wound to the anguish of the repentant mother; but she turned towards Lucy with still tenderer endearments, as if to pacify a sorrow she was incapable of removing.

“The last bitter drop of torment in an overbrimming cup!” faltered Lucy, as she hung over her. “Yet surely it will something avail me in the sight of heaven, if I lift it patiently to my lips!—And dream not, my dear friend, that this miserable idea suggests itself *now* for the first time to my mind; ever since their introduction into society, my persuasion of the evil influence their mother's reputation might shed over their destinies, has been my besetting misery.”

“ Oh ! you see things far too much *en noir* ! ” exclaimed Lady Wroxton, somewhat ashamed, and preparing for her departure. “ All that sort of thing is so soon forgotten in the hubbub of London ! One scandal of the day defeats and obliterates its predecessor ; and most people, in observing the strong affection that subsists between your girls and Lady Barringhurst, imagine them to be her own daughters. She is really more than a mother to them.”

The sufferer replied by a hollow and half-subdued moan of agony.

“ Good bye—dear Lucy. Now pray do not mope and fret yourself to death over those nasty methodistical books which I always find stuffed under your pillow.”

“ Good bye ! ” replied Lucy Tichborne, extending her hand as if in an expiatory act of Christian forgiveness.

“ Can I do any thing for you in London—any commissions ?—Really the town is so intemperately and bewilderingly thronged and

cheerful this morning, that before I came here, I tried the doors of two or three vanity-marts without being able to get the carriage up : and now I am hurrying back to Howell and James's to secure a love of a lama dress, which I am sadly afraid will be gone before my arrival. But as I had promised to look in upon you one day this week, I would not disappoint you."

"Thank you for your intended kindness ; but do not let me detain you from your business ; you see I shall not be left alone."

As she left the room, Lady Wroxton darted a glance of detestation towards Lady Robert Lorton ; whose gestures were involuntarily expressive of an equal disgust as the carriage ostentatiously rolled from the humble gate.

"I congratulate you !" said she to her friend, with an appearance of being herself relieved from persecution.

"Not on her departure—do not congratulate me on her departure—but rather upon my power of submission to her visits ! I look upon

them as one of my most salutary modes of trial, as one of my most valuable means of self-mortification."

"The methodistical books Lady Wroxton presumes to reprobate, seem to have taught you many an important lesson, and to afford you an anchor of sustainment which I cannot but envy. Lucy—Lucy! in your present humiliated frame of mind you can have little to dread;—the only tribunal you are now destined to encounter, is one of more merciful construction than the courts of human judgment; you have plucked every evil thought from your bosom—you have covered your head with the bitter ashes of penitence—and verily you will have your reward!"

"You regard me with a partial eye, my dear, kind friend; but I must not allow the soothing of your gentleness, any more than that of my own vain heart, to deceive me at this solemn period. You scarcely imagine it!—yet at this moment I am wrestling with one of the fond, frail suggestions of a sinful human nature."

“ I cannot believe it to be one of *very* evil prompting,” said Lady Robert with a compassionate smile.

“ You heard what Lady Wroxton asserted respecting my poor girls ? ”

“ I did indeed !—and shuddered at her unwomanly cruelty.”

“ Nay ! I meant not that ;—I allude not to Bessy’s cutting taunt ; but to her suggestion touching the affection subsisting between them and—and Lady Barringhurst.”

“ And which, alas ! from ocular demonstration, I have every reason to think imaginary on the part of Lady Wroxton. I never saw a more decided absence of tenderness than on both sides.”

Lucy started from her pillow, and gratefully seized the hand of her friend. “ God forgive me ! God forgive me ! that I should triumph in such a thought ! But—would you believe it ?—I have the weakness to be cruelly jealous of the character of their feelings towards that

woman!—Above all other earthly punishment would be the certainty that she had superseded me in their love.”

“ I am convinced that on such a point you have nothing to apprehend.”

“ Blessed consolation!—Did you but know how much that woman—that Milicent Darnham—proved herself my enemy;—by what cunning arts she wormed herself first into my confidence, and then into that of poor Barringhurst!—irritating him, by false suggestions, into a degree of cruelty and injustice which drove me first into the commission of perilous follies—and finally into the entanglements of crime.”

“ Doubtless she had her own views in ensuring your flight.”

“ Unfortunately they have proved triumphant. But I could not—no! with all the aids of religion to soften my heart—I fear I could never teach myself to rejoice that my children had learned to regard her as a mother.”

Lucy's medical attendant was now announced, and readily perceived that some unusual excitement had agitated the feelings of the invalid. "I fancy it is *you* whom I must scold," said he, turning to Lady Robert. "I cannot believe you to be an unwelcome visitor; but unless this accelerated pulse deceives me, you are a very unsafe one."

"Instead of defending myself," she replied, "I will leave you with your patient, that you may at least attempt to amend my indiscretions."

"But you will come again soon," murmured Lucy, as Lady Robert bent over her parched lips for a parting kiss.

"I will;—and should any thing transpire—should I find a single word of happy promise to communicate, I will write to you instantly—perhaps to-night."

"Do not forget that my time is short!—that the eyes which languish for their last earthly pleasure, will soon be closed in the darkness of the grave."

“My dear, good ladies!” interrupted the benevolent physician—“remember I cannot admit of these agitating interviews. Unless Lady Robert Lorton will promise to assist me in supporting my patient’s spirits with cheerful conversation and a happier countenance, I must positively prohibit her return.”

“Forgive me for this one time,” said she, attempting to smile; “and when I come again, I will bring such excellent tidings as to supersede the necessity of all your own future exertions.”

In a moment her gentle footsteps glided from the chamber of sickness;—a chamber which she had not visited in vain, either for her own sake, or for that of its fast-declining inmate. Her inward heart was chastened by the spectacle of such profound affliction. And as Lady Robert drove along the by-way of Park-lane, in order to avoid the splendid mob swarming in the drive of Hyde Park—as she noted the various equipages—that of Lady Wroxton among the

rest—of Lucy's former friends, many of whom had rivalled her indiscretion without sharing in her condemnation—she could not but shrink from the remembrance of her own course of worldly vanity !

She saw the same coronets, the same liveries glaring in the sunshine ;—equestrians pairing off in many a couple—flirtations proceeding through the windows of many a flaunting equipage, which had haunted the same spot during the married days of Lady Barringhurst. The young, and the gay, and the thoughtless were before her in all the giddy indulgence of their dangerous pleasures ; and as she reverted from all she saw to all she had recently witnessed in the chamber of the miserable Lucy, she shuddered to think of the heavy retributions falling upon a life of levity !

CHAPTER IX.

And thronging thoughts—remembrances of youth—
And early love—and home—and all the spells
Which stir the spirit from its lassitude
Came back upon his soul with that one word
Of obsolete endearment.

Southey.

“WHO dines with us to-day, my dear Anastasia?” inquired the Duke of Lisborough, entering a boudoir such as a peri might have sighed to inhabit;—a boudoir hung with the softest silken draperies—twined with arabesques of the palest gold—carpeted with embossed velvet, and decorated with vases of Sèvres, containing flowers of such rare and choice selection

as had yet shed their perfumes in no other mansion of the kingdom.

“Indeed I do not know,” replied the gentle Duchess, giving an eager jerk to the golden vice on which her netting was fastened. “I have very little memory for a catalogue of indifferent names;—you had better ask Fonbelles, or the groom of the chambers.”

“Oh! I am not anxious to perplex your recollections to the full amount of the dinner-table,” replied his Grace, goodnaturedly. “But perceiving preparations in the dining-room for a large party, I wished to know whether it comprised merely our family, or intimate friends, or whether it is to be a formal affair.”

“In order that you may make your own arrangements for getting away early to Lady Rachel Verney’s?”

“My dear Anastasia!” said the Duke, looking significantly towards Lady Clara Radbourne, whom he had found sitting with his wife, and

who was now busily employed in pulling a pink magnolia to pieces, and scattering the leaves on the floor, "You know that I have not been in Lady Rachel's house six times during the last six years."

"With more consideration for my feelings and your own respectability, you would not have been there *once*; as you are well aware that neither Charlotte nor myself think proper to visit Lord Grandville's mistress."

"Anastasia — Anastasia," interrupted the Duke, "how much is it beneath you to repeat such idle scandals!"—As to Lady Grayfield, I hold *her* to be still more inexcusable; for she knows full well that Lady Rachel Verney was the chosen associate and friend of her own beloved mother."

"Possibly! but since the days of that auspicious friendship, people have learned to see things with their own eyes, and call things by their right names. I fancy there are many of the late Duchess of Lisborough's intimate asso-

ciates, with whom *I* should be very sorry to find myself connected."

The Duke's colour rose to his temples, for he had dearly loved his mother; and his filial affection gave greater energy to his reply than was wont to animate his words. "Either Charlotte Grayfield or yourself might do well to emulate so amiable, so pleasing, so feminine a being!—Few, indeed, are those among our modern women of fashion, who can pretend to her attractions or—"

"Her domestic virtues!" retorted the Duchess with a sneer, and a glance of triumph towards her friend Lady Clara. "However, I need not have taxed you with an intended visit to this Verney woman;—for I now remember that this is one of Lady Cosmo Somerset's nights, which I know you would not miss for the world; you are there, at least, secure of meeting all Lady Robert Lorton's Willingham-tribe of adventurers."

"For your own sake and mine, I trust you

apply that word inadvertently; Lady Clara is probably aware that Lady Maria Willingham—by birth a De Vesci—is a near relative of our own.

“By the way, Duchess,” observed Lady Clara, tossing away the stalk of the hapless flower she had been leisurely demolishing, “surely you were telling me, when the Duke of Lisborough came in, that those very Willinghams dine with you to-day?”

“Did I?” said Anastasia, blushing for the meanness of her detected falsehood. “Unimportant facts and unimportant people are apt to slip through one’s memory. But here is Fonbelle’s list;—yes! the three Willinghams and their little self-sufficient heiress; Lord and Lady Robert, and Charlotte Grayfield; Béthizy—Russell—that singing Mr. Mulgrave, and Mr. Charles Willingham. Yes! I remember now!—It is your own especial party;—the ancient Calmersfield tribe of loves and graces; with the valuable addition of that coxcomb,

Monsieur de Béthizy, whom Lady Grayfield begged me to invite, that she might amuse herself with Miss De Vesci's prudish airs on his behalf; and the Barringhursts—whom I took the liberty of asking to please myself—inasmuch as I think Mr. Willingham is inclined to admire Georgiana."

Again did the Duchess glance significantly towards Lady Clara Radbourne; while the Duke, who judged it better to leave the two mysterious ladies to themselves, observed as he left the boudoir, "If I meet Basingstoke, I will ask him to join the party, for a reason of a similar kind. And by the way, Anastasia, I am beginning to have hopes of you, since you turn even *your* demure thoughts towards the indiscretions of match-making; I shall find you giving waltzing-parties, and visiting poor Lady Rachel Verney after all."

"Do you allow of that sort of impertinence?" inquired Lady Clara Radbourne, after he had fairly left the room.

“Indeed I do not!—in the course of the evening, I will take care to make Lisborough pay the penalty of the offence. And since he intends to ask Basingstoke, Clara, you must positively send home for your dress and dine here yourself. The Duke only proposes the measure by way of conciliating that odious Claudia Willingham, and tormenting me; and I shall therefore meet him on his own ground. Mélanide shall dress your hair—you must look your best—and then, Miss Claudia!—take heed of your conquest.”

“I am not much afraid to enter the lists with *her*;—eighteen against eight-and-twenty are fearful odds in my favour! I am much more afraid of that dove-eyed Georgiana Barringhurst;—she looks so uncommonly sly, and so ostentatiously humble.”

“Oh! that matter you must leave to my arrangement. I flatter myself that, thanks to my ample experience with Lisborough’s obstinate temper, I am far from a bad manager. I have

quite made up my mind—both for poor dear Lady Barringhurst's interests and your own, that Georgiana shall marry that prosy Mr. Willingham."

"That sandy-haired piece of solemnity!"

"Oh! he can be delightfully agreeable when he chooses: one day, at dinner, at the Cosmo Somersets, he entertained a whole party of bores, and without the slightest effort. Besides, he is an only son, with immense expectations; and every one prophesies that he will live to be Premier!"

"Then I think you had better get him for *me*, instead of Lord Basingstoke. I verily believe the only reason Mamma has set her heart upon that match, is to vex Lady Robert and her *protégée*, Miss Claudia; who, you know, were formerly in combination to keep our lady-mother at Coventry. As to me, I have no particular fancy for Bazy; and I think the chances of being wife to the Prime Minister, are well worth the exchange."

“Unluckily Charles Willingham appears to have taken a fancy to this little Barringhurst girl;—he is intimate, on political grounds, with her father; and he has a stiff old maid of a sister who was formerly a great friend to Millicent. I think they will manufacture a match out of all these materials.”

“Well! I shall despatch a note to Mamma, apprizing her that I dine here—and *why*; and Mélanide shall bring me my pink dress of *velours d’Isapahan*—which is my robe of triumph. And then for the tug of war with Claudia and Georgiana.”

At the banquets of the great, there is generally very little opportunity for the exertion of finesse in seeking and retaining places in an eligible neighbourhood;—the definite rank of the guests is too peremptory a claim to be waved, even at the suggestion of youth and beauty and personal predilection. The poor Duke of Lisborough found himself inevitably supported by the fiery Lady Radbourne and

the frigid Lady Barringhurst ; and it was only by dint of much obstinate manœuvring, and defiance of the suggestion of the groom of the chambers, that Charles Willingham contrived to station himself by the side of Miss De Vesci. His exultation was somewhat damped, indeed, when he perceived the radiant countenance of Monsieur de Béthizy unfolding his supercilious smiles on her left hand. And two other personages were almost equally discomposed by the arrangement ;—the Duchess—who had intended the future Premier to bestow the charms of his conversation on Georgiana Barringhurst ;—and Lady Grayfield, who felt a singular curiosity to discover whether those of the young Parisian possessed the miraculous gift of witty animation which the judgment of universal London had assigned to the colloquial flippancy of Monsieur de Béthizy.

“ I have some intelligence for you, my dear Minnie,” said Mr. Willingham, lowering his voice under cover of the Maître d’Hotel’s offi-

cious distribution of the several varieties of *potage*, so as to be secure from Lady Maria Willingham's attentive ears.

"Let it be agreeable!—or this *Julienne* will breathe its tarragonic vapours in vain. If you have any thing ill-natured or ill-omened to relate——"

"Nay——"

"You know, and *I* know, that you excel in both particulars: so if you have any disagreeable intelligence, let us reserve it for the desert. I neither eat ice, nor drink claret."

"I have no reasons to think that my news will diminish your appetite by the wing of an ortolan, or the claw of a shrimp. Our friend Lorimer will be at Calais to-morrow—and on Thursday—in London!"

"Is that all?—I have known it these five days;—and having been admitted for the first time to poor dear Lady Lorimer this morning, we have been talking of nothing else but Frederick's arrival. I was in hopes you had some agreeable variety to offer me."

“ I am aware,” said Mr. Willingham, somewhat vexed by what he regarded as levity on the part of Miss De Vesci, “ that the caprices of woman’s nature require the constant excitement of novelty ; but still I should have imagined that an event of so much moment to yourself, might have preserved its interest somewhat longer than the report of a fashionable marriage, or the scandal of a fashionable elopement.”

“ Thank you for your rebuke ;—I told you just now that you had a happy talent for the utterance of illnatured opinions. Nevertheless I *shall* feel most truly gratified by Frederick’s arrival ; and one of my first anxieties will be to assure him of the friendly zeal with which you have executed his commission ;—of the affectionate care with which you have watched over my happiness, counselled my inexperience, and rewarded my efforts to obtain your good opinion.”

“ Your *efforts* ! Minnie — Minnie ! I am perfectly acquainted with your contempt of all my antiquated prejudices, and unfashionable

principles!—*My* good opinion!—what an affectation of humility on the part of Miss De Vesci of Bensleigh Park!”

“ You have always laid so much stress on my accession of importance since my uncle’s death, that I am beginning to believe you, Charles, a very worldly-minded person. You have never treated me with the simple honesty of friendly affection since I became what is called an heiress.”

“ You have mistaken your date;—think again!”

“ From what other event can I date the alteration of your demeanour towards me?”

“ From your engagement with Lord Stapylford.”

Minnie was silenced in a moment. Her own reminiscences afforded ample confirmation of the truth of Mr. Willingham’s assertion. Grieved and confused by the accusation she had thus wantonly brought upon herself, she turned towards Monsieur de Béthizy in the hope of finding relief from her embarrassment

in his lively *badinage* ; but having perceived the young heiress to be engaged in something resembling a serious altercation with her cousin and neighbour, Béthizy was now directing his irrepressible vivacity towards the entertainment of Lady Clara Radbourne, who hoped to attract the jealous notice of Lord Basingstoke by the affectation of immoderate delight with which she listened to the amphibious, half-French, half-English witticisms of the bear-leader of the Duke of Saxe-Altenburg.

Nor were men and things better distributed among the residue of the guests ! Lady Grayfield, instead of the ranting Frenchman who had so much excited her curiosity, and whom she was rather intent upon reforming from the evil of his ways (and means), was seated next to Conversation-Russell ; who was favouring her with an account of some of Champollion's latest discoveries, and with his own private theory of Mummyology. He had many learned wonders to tell of Egypt ; culled from Denon and Dr. Young, the *Zauberflöte*, Mrs. Charles Lush-

ington, Bankes, Legh, Belzoni—and the inedited memoirs of Ben D'Lhi Badalli Hazarrah, the Morocco Envoy to the Court of Spain! He had a brother who had served with Abercrombie—a cousin who had been Consul at Alexandria; he criticised Anastasius, and sneered at the Epicurean; and, until his mouth was stopped with some excellent *filets de levreau au jus d'orange amer*, Lady Grayfield fairly wished him under the base of the Great Pyramid, or following the descending current of the Nile towards the Great Cataract!

Nor were the Willingham girls more fortunate in their destination. Having been made aware by Lady Robert Lorton that they were to encounter the trying rivalry of the young and lovely Barringhursts, they had called in every art of the toilet to their own aid. The slight tinge of *rouge végétal superfin*, which was to simulate the blush of maiden modesty—the profuse ringlets of jetty hue and silken softness, which were to flow in dishevelled grace around their brows—the shoulders bared to the

extreme verge of decent endurance—the laboured smile—the elaborate plaitings and gatherings and puffings which purported to disguise the absence of many a youthful charm, and girlish grace—such were the superfluous beauties in which they had arrayed themselves to compete with the inimitable captivations of a perfectly artless demeanour, and a perfectly simple costume. Claudia and Eleanor might have been worshipped as the very queens of fashion; but Lucy and Georgiana, as the humblest and loveliest of their handmaidens, would have won every idolater from the shrine!

Had the Willinghams, however, boasted their brightest attractions of *auld lang syne*—the smiles of their very earliest days of establishment-hunting—all, on the present occasion, would have proved in vain. Claudia was seated beside Henry Mulgrave, whom she detested as a younger brother, unless when he was useful in exhibiting her voice to advantage by the relief of his own beautiful tenor; and poor Eleanor was utterly extinguished between Lord

Barrington and Lord Robert Lorton, who, with the exquisite politeness of married Englishmen, discussed the Emigration Question by a cross-fire over her plate, during three courses and the dessert!—Such are the *contre-temps* of a dinner-party composed of ill-assorted persons!

Among the numerous Anglicisms which the prejudiced Duchess had been the means of introducing into Lisborough House, that of a prolonged separation of the male and female guests had never been effected. The Duke, like most other men who have resided much upon the Continent, was in the habit of drinking wine as an accompaniment to dinner, instead of swallowing it as a solitary dose: he was always one of the first to walk into the drawing-room; and his secret persuasion that Anastasia would take very little pains, on the present occasion, to entertain her female associates, rather accelerated his movements. Mr. Willingham immediately followed him; and observing that Lady Robert Lorton and Miss De Vesci were alone absent from the little

group surrounding a circular table covered with all the new publications of the day, and every engraving of distinguished merit, he pursued his search through one or two adjacent chambers which seemed to be lighted up for reception.

As he approached the most remote of these, the beautiful boudoir which had been the scene of her Grace's morning *démêlé* with the Duke—a sound of distress forewarned him that it was already occupied; and as the plaintive voice which reached his ear was of female intonation, delicacy whispered that he must not presume to intrude. It occurred to him, however, that it might be that of Miss De Vesci—of his own Minnie!—and apprehensive that some painful occurrence might have agitated her feelings, or that perhaps his own comments during dinner might have tended to grieve and vex her, he could not refrain from overstepping the prohibited threshold.

In a moment he was convinced and satisfied; but he was satisfied also of his own indiscretion.

Minnie was kneeling on an ottoman before Lady Robert Lorton, and assisting her to comfort and support Miss Barringhurst, who was seated by her side on the divan encircling the boudoir, and weeping bitterly. Mr. Willingham made a precipitate retreat, but not before Miss De Vesci's rapid eyes had detected his entrance. Instantly rising from her knees, she followed him into the ante-room, and whispered with much trepidation of manner, "Dearest Charles! pray linger near the door; and if the Barringhursts or the Duchess attempt to enter, pray do your best to detain them from us by conversation.

She flew back again before he had time to seek even a moment's explanation—he was completely mystified! One thing, however, he had heard—and heard distinctly;—Minnie had called him "dearest Charles!" and for the first time, alas! during very many years. The emotion which this reminiscent sound had sufficed to stir within his heart, for some time occupied his whole attention; nor was he

roused from his reverie till Miss Barringhurst, leaning on Minnie De Vesci's arm, and followed by Lady Robert Lorton, passed him with a tolerably tranquil demeanour on her return from the boudoir to the drawing-room.

Mr. Willingham felt that he would have given worlds for a few minutes conversation with his cousin; but this was impossible. On entering the saloon, he found her surrounded by Monsieur de Béthizy, Lord Basingstoke, Beau Russell, and several others of the party; so that any communication of a confidential nature was out of the question. In spite of the lively animation with which she entered into the playful trifling of her sisters and their friends, he fancied that her eyes bore the trace of recent tears—and again he became painfully anxious to ascertain their origin. While Claudia and Eleanor therefore were preparing to comply with the Duchess's request for music, and to join with Mr. Mulgrave in a trio—a former favourite of the Duke of Lisborough's—he contrived to address her unobserved.

“The kind manner in which you deigned just now——” he began—but Miss Willingham hastily interrupted him.

“Oh, do not recur to *that*;—in the agitation of addressing you I know not what I said.”

“And thanks to that very agitation, you spoke to me in the tone and terms you *once* employed at all seasons and in every mood! The change has perhaps made me too bold—too sanguine—too happy!—for it has given me courage to ask for an explanation of the scene I witnessed just now. Can you forgive my indiscretion?”

“I can indeed—and the more willingly, because I hope you may be able to tell me in return how Mary has prospered in our cause.

“In what cause?”

Miss De Vesci, with great delicacy, and with as much brevity as the circumstances would admit, now explained to Mr. Willingham the unhappy position of the Miss Barringhursts and their mother; and of Lady Robert Lorton’s

sanguine trust in his sister's interposition with her friend Milicent.

"This is indeed a very serious attempt—and one that should not be lightly undertaken. To interfere in a dilemma of so much delicacy is to intrude with unjustifiable boldness into the domestic privacies of another," observed Charles Willingham with stern gravity.

"But think of this unhappy woman—of this dying mother."

"She has but encountered the doom originally braved by her wilful profligacy."

"Do not judge her too severely!—I can forgive your harsh comments on my own conduct, my dearest cousin—for I am prosperous, and young, and happy. But this unhappy being is poor, and wretched, and expiring; do not—do not—judge her so severely!"

While Minnie continued to address him in this strain, Mr. Willingham could have listened for ever; nay!—he was even inclined to sacrifice his own opinion on the subject to his cousin's gentle pleading.

“ I know not how Mary may have succeeded,” said he at length ; “ I fear but ill ;—or she would have hastened to communicate her tidings. But as you have trusted the sister, you may perhaps condescend to employ the brother in the same cause ;—I have myself some interest with Lord Barringhurst—suffer me to employ it in attempting to achieve your object.”

“ This is kind beyond my utmost expectations !”

“ Minnie !—what kindness — what exertion have you not a right to command at my hands !”

“ My conscience reminds me that I have already too often abused my claims on your forbearance.”

“ And at what hour to-morrow may I call to acquaint you with my success or failure ?”

“ At any !—at all hours you are sure of admittance.”

“ At two then ?”

“ At two !—and may every good angel speed you on your errand of mercy !”

CHAPTER X.

The love of higher things and better days,
The unbounded hope, and heavenly ignorance
Of what is called the world, and the world's ways ;
The moments when we gather from a glance
More joy than from all future pride or praise,
Which kindle manhood—but can ne'er entrance
The heart in an existence of its own,
Of which another's bosom is the zone.

Byron.

It was not often that Mr. Willingham's heart had been agitated by such a variety of pleasing emotions, as conspired to bewilder his feelings when he approached the dwelling of Lady Maria and her daughters on the following day. Endowed—or rather afflicted—in a supreme degree with that reserve of character which forms a species of moral epidemic in England, Charles Willingham was habitually intent on

disavowing and disguising every impulse of his nature that could be supposed to verge on tenderness or enthusiasm. Believing such demonstrations to be derogatory to the dignity of masculine firmness, and dreading that his own irrepressible sensibility should be confounded with the affectations of the feeble and the foolish, he had laboured to assume an iron vizard, in concealment of the mutable expression of his countenance. And thus he had acquired a tone of seriousness more consonant with his political vocation than with his years; and a general reputation of coldness and impracticability of disposition, wholly unaccordant with his real nature.

But there existed another latent cause for the gravity of Mr. Willingham's address, and for his air of recklessness and unsociability. Although quoted upon all occasions among his youthful contemporaries, as a man who might have been worn within the heart of hearts of the Prince of Denmark—as a man who “was not passion's slave,”—the young heir of Heddeston Court was in truth the most devoted, as well as the most hopeless of all the multitudinous

lovers of modern Europe ! He could scarcely remember how long it was since he had first adored his cousin Minnie ; and although he could have accurately defined both the day, and the hour, and the spot, in which he had become aware of her own engrossing attachment for her playfellow, Montague Stapylford, he would have found it a very difficult task to conjecture when, where, and how his bootless affection for Miss De Vesci might become subdued into a becoming moderation of cousinly regard.

For many years past—for long, wearisome, vexatious years—he had been sensible indeed of the hopelessness of his attachment, and had constantly revolved within the secrecy of his mind, those thousand and one plausible axioms of philosophy which are supposed to be efficacious in regulating all superfluous action of the heart. He had told himself that he was a fool and a madman—till he was tired of the monotony of that uncontradicted assertion ; he had promised himself to overcome his idle attachment—until he was ashamed of renewing the broken covenant ; and still, alas !—unmoved by par-

liamentary pursuits, or agricultural experiments—by enclosure-bills or railways—by sedentary winters at Heddeston Court, or rambling summers among the Pyrenees—still he found himself as passionately in love as ever !

From the moment when he had first beheld his cousin Minnie with a lapful of roses, sitting beside her father's couch of sickness, to that in which he found the lovely heiress, Miss De Vesci, presiding in her splendid mansion in Portman-square, no human creature had ever rivalled her in the partial tenderness of his heart. He had marked her growing attachment for Lord Stapylford—he believed in her actual engagement to Lord Lorimer—yet still he loved her ;—he felt that he might as well cease to exist, as tear this cherished passion from his heart !

With this strong impulse to actuate his feelings, it is not wonderful that the change of manner evinced towards him at Lisborough House by the object of his idolatry, should have excited the most agitating tumult in his mind. He forbore, like many another lover, to consult his reason on such a perplexing point ;

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he was satisfied to enjoy the affectionate friendship of his cousin, without further self-interrogation; and when, according to his appointment, he visited her on the morrow, the pleasing tidings he had to communicate touching his own successful exertions with Lord Barrington, in pursuance of her wishes, had filled his heart with delightful anticipations of his cousin's overflowing gratitude, and of his own "measureless content." He found himself approaching the presence of his beloved, in a rapture of emotion such as he had rarely felt, and would have blushed to acknowledge—even to himself.

What, then, was the transition of feeling—what the overpowering vexation—with which on entering the drawing-room in Portman-square, he perceived the object of all these sensitive promptings, seated upon a sofa, with visible traces of tears upon her cheeks, and with Lord Lorimer by her side! The warm greeting with which he was instantly welcomed by his friend sufficed, for a moment, to conceal the suspension of his own utterance; and Frederick was so warm and so fluent in his thanks for the

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kindness with which Mr. Willingham had exerted himself in Lady Lorimer's behalf, upon occasion of the recent death of his father, that the visitor found time to recover his self-possession, ere he ventured upon a reply. Still he found, or fancied it impossible, to conceal his own surprise and embarrassment; and more particularly when, after sundry incoherent attempts to express the gratification he felt upon his friend's unexpected arrival, he fancied he could discern a glance of good intelligence pass between Lord Lorimer and Miss De Vesci; followed by a smile on his part, and a deep blush on that of the lady;—Mr. Willingham grew angry!—and his indignation scarcely served to amend his eloquence.

“It may, perhaps, interest you very little—*this morning*—to learn that I have been successful in my embassy to Lord Barringhurst,” said he gravely, to Miss De Vesci. “I have obeyed your commands; and having now acquainted you with the result, I will no longer intrude upon your time. Lord Lorimer has, probably, business of more importance to communicate.”

“*Lord Lorimer!*” reiterated Frederick, equally

astonished and diverted by his solemnity of manner.

“*Business!*” repeated Minnie, in the same tone.

“Why, my dear Willingham, do you really suppose that I cannot entertain your cousin for an hour, without assuming the airs of my vocation, and talking to her about India Bonds, and the 3 per cents?—Do you set me down for such a Jack-in-office, as to intrude my ‘guardianship’ upon a morning visit?”

Mr. Willingham, thus rallied, resumed his seat; but he could not so easily resume the composure of his demeanour.

“Nevertheless,” continued Lord Lorimer, with the most malicious significance, “I will not compel you to remain here against your will. Miss De Vesci and I have reached the conclusion of our gossipry;—we have been talking an infinite deal of nothing for three hours past, by the Shrewsbury clock; and as I shall return here to dinner, I will spare poor Minnie the remainder of my discourse until this evening.”

Mr. Willingham looked as if he would have

gladly seen this familiar friend of his own and of his cousin torn to pieces by wild horses; but he compelled himself to smile a ghastly smile, as Lord Lorimer proceeded to ring, and inquire for his horses. He immediately determined to outstay him, and ensure a few minutes of uninterrupted conversation with Minnie.

“If you have no engagement, my dear Willingham,” said Lord Lorimer, wholly unsuspecting of his intentions, “pray come and chaperon me in a visit to your sister. Miss De Vesci assures me that I shall not obtain admittance in Grosvenor-square, unless sanctioned by your august presence, or by *her* intercession.”

Mr. Willingham, unprepared with an excuse, was forced to comply; and in a few minutes he found himself riding in friendly familiarity, side by side, with his earliest friend and latest enemy. By degrees, the embarrassment of his feelings wore away; and, in conversing with Lord Lorimer upon subjects of public interest, he gradually resumed his former tone of intimate regard. When they were admitted to Mary’s presence, however, her brother’s consciousness of vague dissatisfaction was renewed.

It appeared to his jaundiced eyes that Frederick's mode of addressing Miss Willingham was far too ardent to become the affianced lover of Miss DeVesci;—that there was far more of the tender trepidation of the lover in his demeanour towards his youthful playmate, than towards his ward. Could Lord Lorimer be playing them false?—Was he, in fact, the admirer of Mary, and the interested suitor of the heiress of Bensleigh?—But no! Minnie's extreme loveliness and mighty powers of attraction forbade the jealous thought!—Who—*who* could help loving Minnie?—

Of the feelings entertained by Mary in return, he found himself, meanwhile, a very insufficient judge. In former times, particularly during the period of Frederick's boyish devotion to Eleanor Willingham, and the earlier portion of his absence from England, Charles had occasionally been led to suspect the existence of a partiality on his sister's part, towards his gifted friend. But Mary had so little indulged in the regrets and fractiousness of an unhappy passion—her demeanour had been so uniformly forbearing, gentle, and cheerful—she had ad-

dressed herself so earnestly to the task of consoling others, rather than to the indulgence of her own feelings—that he had gradually relinquished all idea of her attachment for the absent Frederick. Even on the present occasion, her self-command was only for a moment suspended by the abrupt announcement of Lord Lorimer; she had so long taught herself to consider him as the affianced lover of her more fortunate cousin, that she had also learned to suspend the vehemence of her own predilections; and although she had recently acquired suspicions leading to a very different conclusion, she had not forfeited her own self-resignation to his indifference towards herself. A hectic blush suffused her cheeks for full ten minutes after his entrance; but it faded only to leave her some degrees paler than usual. Strange as it may appear, it was a relief to all parties when the visit was at an end; and although Mr. Willingham readily consented to accompany Lord Lorimer on his way to Downing-street, where he had business to transact at the Foreign Office, it was more from a hope of penetrating the mystery of his engagements

with Miss De Vesci, than from any pleasure in his friend's society.

As they were lounging leisurely towards the official quarter of the town, Monsieur de Béthizy, who was refreshing himself at Grange's with iced sherbet and wafers, caught a glimpse of Lord Lorimer, and hastened to join them. During his lordship's diplomatic apprenticeship at Paris, Béthizy had been one of his closest allies, and most constant companions; the shrewdness and lively humour of the Parisian *évaporé*, compensated in Lord Lorimer's estimation for innumerable foibles.

“ Ah ! my dear Lorimer—a thousand welcomes;—your presence alone was required to render London charming!—And what brought you to England—and when did you come—and where are you going?—How did you ever make up your mind to desert St. Carlo for yonder old barrack in the Haymarket;—and to quit the laughing shores of Calabria for the murky skies of the banks of the Thames ?”

“ Believe me, I am very well satisfied to set my foot again upon this ‘ *dolce ad ingrata patria* ’ of mine.”

“Ah! you are a fortunate fellow! They tell me you have just lost your father, and have succeeded to the possession of his estates. *Vivent les droits d’aînesse!* although, in my own case, they embrace nothing worthy inheritance but a few thousand acres of pine-trees in the Landes;—a sandy desert, whose vintage produces no juice more generous than turpentine! Still, for your sake, my dear Lorimer, —*Vivent les droits d’aînesse.*”

“As I have only one younger brother to gainsay my claims,—” Lord Lorimer began, in order to divert Mr. Willingham’s indignant attention from Béthizy’s flippancy. But his Parisian friend had no scruple in interrupting him; for this allusion to the position of his family and possessions, had touched upon a chord peculiarly interesting to the feelings of Monsieur de Béthizy.

“Yes! you are indeed a fortunate fellow! my dear Lorimer; young, handsome, talented, noble, rich;—your father obliges you by dying before you are too old to enjoy his heritage—”

Mr. Willingham could scarcely repress his disgust at the levity of this allusion.—“And

you have, besides, the happiness and distinction of being guardian to the prettiest little creature to be seen out of Paris !”

Poor Charles !—to hear his cousin thus familiarly named by a man whom he detested—and to a man whom he believed that cousin to regard with a most unwarrantable degree of affection—was almost more than he could endure ! But Monsieur de Béthizy, who looked upon him simply as a worthy young Englishman, of the Utilitarian school—as a country-cousin of Miss De Vesci’s, addicted to an obscure and unprincipled tailor, and wholly unworthy of being admitted to any participation in her affairs—proceeded to inflict a still severer martyrdom upon his feelings.

“ *Ah ! ça, mon cher—dis donc !*” said he, again addressing Lord Lorimer in the most careless manner, on the subject nearest and dearest to Mr. Willingham’s heart. “ This little heiress of yours—is it true that you intend to marry her ?”

“ Indeed, I hardly know ; *do you ?*” exclaimed Lord Lorimer, laughing heartily at the unceremonious abruptness of the inquiry.

“ *Sous votre bon plaisir!*” replied Monsieur de Béthizy, taking off his hat, with a solemn air of mock respect.

“ My pleasure is very little to the purpose on this occasion,” observed Lord Lorimer; “ for that of the lady will incline, I fear, but little in your favour.”

“ My dear friend, let us understand each other,” resumed Béthizy, with the greatest *sang froid*; “ I have too sincere a regard for you to have interfered with your ward during your absence;—knowing that your arrival was shortly expected, I have deferred my formal proposals till I should have obtained your sanction to my views. And now, tell me *sans façon*, and in all friendly frankness—have you any personal designs on Miss Vesci; and if not, have I your permission to prosecute my own?”

Charles Willingham could scarcely repress the indignant remonstrance that rose to his lips, or his strong desire to inflict a castigation upon the impertinent querist. But he felt that the information he would himself have given worlds to obtain, was on the point of being most unexpectedly and gratuitously vouchsafed to

Monsieur de Béthizy's daring effrontery; and he actually trembled with emotion as he awaited the reply of Lord Lorimer.

"My dear Béthizy," answered the young diplomatist, with most deliberate calmness, "you have acted according to your usual discretion, in consulting me thus freely and explicitly on the subject; and I have sincere pleasure in satisfying your scruples by an explanation equally frank. I have *no* engagements with Miss De Vesci, nor the smallest intention of seeking any. You must therefore be assured of the gratification I should feel in bestowing her hand and fortune on yourself—"

Charles Willingham started with surprise and vexation, while Lord Lorimer continued—

"Were it not that her affections are irrevocably fixed upon another person, to whom, I trust to see her eventually united. Thus far, Béthizy, my friendship for you induces me to betray the secret of my ward; and I am satisfied that you are too much of a *preux chevalier*, to urge me to any further explanation."

"Nay! I shall neither form a conjecture, nor indulge myself with a single regret! Your

candour and my own have spared me a world of trouble and vexation; for I have a little speculation in view in Portland-place, which will serve my turn fully as well as Bensleigh Park. In the mean time, my dear fellow!—pray for my better luck with the fair Arabella Westland.—*Monsieur Veelengarm, j'ai l'honneur de vous saluer!—Lorimare—au revoir!*”

Mr. Willingham flattered himself that the ice being thus broken by Monsieur de Béthizy's undaunted impudence, he should be enabled to pursue the subject with Lord Lorimer after his departure. But scarcely had the heiress-hunter galloped off on his road towards Sir Thomas Westland's, when Frederick, looking towards the clock of the Horse-Guards, exclaimed that he should be too late at the Foreign Office; and taking a hasty leave of his friend, he proceeded rapidly on his errand. Charles Willingham, although deeply chagrined at this disappointment, consoled himself with the certainty of their meeting on the following day. Meanwhile he returned home, and prepared himself to encounter his sister's interrogatories, in a state of mind still more perplexed than

ever. If Minnie's affections were indeed thus deeply pledged, what mattered it to him whether Lord Lorimer or Lord Stapylford were the successful pretender to her hand? While, as far as regarded her own future prospects of happiness, he would have preferred a thousand-fold to see her become the wife of the honourable and excellent Frederick. It was a long time since he had recurred to Lord Stapylford's former malefactions with so earnest an abhorrence, as that which took possession of his heart between his interview with Lord Lorimer, and his return to Grosvenor-square.

Meanwhile, although a feeling of jealous pique had induced Mr. Willingham to declare his belief that Miss De Vesci had become indifferent to the success of his embassy to Lord Barringhurst, and although Minnie herself, in the premature return of her youthful guardian, and the extraordinary trepidation of her cousin, had found subjects of personal interest peculiarly engrossing—it is not to be imagined that she could overlook the affectionate promptitude with which her commission had been executed, or withhold her sympathy from the

joy experienced among the friends of poor Lucy, on occasion of the concessions obtained by Charles Willingham's interposition. During the whole of the afternoon, her thoughts were continually wandering to the interview which she had found, from her cousin, to be already appointed between the guilty mother and her long-estranged daughters. She knew that Lord Barringhurst, being unwilling to render the event a subject of discussion in his household, or of vexation to his wife, had conditioned that Lady Robert Lorton should call for Lucy and Georgiana, as if intent only upon a morning drive; and conduct them to Kensington—to the bosom of the dying penitent.

But if Miss De Vesci—young and guiltless, and happy—found matter for anxiety and tearful emotion, in the mere imagination of the scene that must ensue from such a meeting, what was the thrilling agony of soul—the heart-stirring tumult of feeling with which Lucy herself contemplated the promised arrival of her children! Lady Robert had lost no time in forewarning her of the approaching realization of her eager hopes; and it was many hours after

the arrival of the propitious messenger, before the sufferer could divest herself of an apprehension that the whole project must be some delirious coinage of her brain.

She exerted herself to rise, and strove to subdue the irritating excitement of her nerves, by busily arraying herself to meet these promised, these precious visitors. But her trembling hands refused their accustomed office ; as she attempted to fasten a string, or bind back her scattered hair, she became again and again overpowered by anticipations of the happiness that awaited her ; and hysteric tears and hysteric laughter gave utterance to the bewildering oppression of her heart. “My children—my dear, dear children !” she exclaimed again and again, with frantic vehemence ; folding her arms across her bosom, with an unconscious gesture ;—as if already embracing the restored darlings of her tenderness !

By some delusion of feeling, some strange perplexity of thought, Lucy had never learned to consider her daughters otherwise than they had appeared at the moment of her flight. As a mother, bereaved by death of the child of her

affections, continues to regard it throughout her afterlife, as her babe, her youngling—infantine as when snatched from her arms into the grave;—so Lucy, to whom her daughters had long been as the lost and the dead, could never teach herself to think of them, saving as the little Lucy and the little Georgiana she had deserted!—Their original image remained in her mind, unobliterated by the knowledge of any subsequent period;—they were still the thoughtless, happy, lovely and beloved children, whom she had so fondly cherished in her days of innocence;—her tenderness disavowed the picture of their progress towards womanhood, which the importunate hand of reason would sometimes present.

The day advanced—the meridian sun shone brightly into the chamber of sickness; and as her spirits rose, or sank into depression, Lucy alternately fancied that its beams appeared to deride her shame, and expose her wretchedness;—or to cheer her soul and bring promise of happier times. Sometimes she prayed in humble and penitential agony;—sometimes the prospects of her gratified affection irradiated

her pale face with involuntary smiles ;—sometimes she wept with the unresisting feebleness of an infant. At the sound of every approaching vehicle, she started from her couch ; but only to cower back again with shuddering tremour, as disappointment and humiliation resumed their influence !

At length a carriage stopped at her gate. The well-known voice and well-known step of Lady Robert Lorton were heard on the stairs ; it seemed as if she were giving time, by this announcement, for Lucy to prepare herself for the interview.

Prepare herself for such a moment !—Could weeks, could years of preparation afford sufficient fortitude for the endurance of such a crisis ?—The breath scarcely hovered upon the sufferer's lips ;—her heart beat faintly, as if its office were nearly ended ;—when the door was gently opened, and two tall, elegant young women, advanced towards her.

“My Lucy !—my Georgiana !”—murmured the agonized mother. But when she looked upon the maturity of her lovely daughters—when she felt herself placed before them—guilty

—dishonoured—a fallen woman in presence of their innocence—she sank unconsciously upon her knees at their feet. All her purposed endearments were forgotten in the overpowering consciousness of humiliation.

“Forgive me! forgive me!” she faltered, as the Miss Barringhursts, bending over her, would have assisted her to rise.

“My own dear mother!” exclaimed the agitated girls, while they bathed her with their tears.

“Forgive me!” whispered the sufferer in a still fainter voice; and sliding from their embrace, she fell prostrate on the floor.

Lady Robert Lorton flew to their assistance. But all was over!—The purified spirit had been released in that last struggle between penitence and maternal tenderness!—The soul of Lucy had entered into its rest!

CHAPTER XI.

“Such things, perhaps, we’d best discuss within,”
Said he ; “Don’t let us make ourselves absurd
In public, by a scene, nor raise a din ;
For then the chief and only satisfaction
Will be much quizzing on the whole transaction.”

Beppo.

ON the day of these eventful passages, Lisborough House was not without its share in the general agitation. The Duke, who had long been voted by his male friends to be among the most miserable victims of conjugal oppression—who was sneered at by the witlings of every fashionable club as the most hen-pecked of his species—found himself condemned to a more than ordinary cruelty of martyrdom. He was now so well accustomed to Anastasia’s sul-

lenness—so thoroughly inured to her dignified silence in a tête-à-tête, whenever she chanced to be out of sorts with the world, or indigestive, or “nervous”—(the polite definition of *ill-tempered*)—that he had ceased to court her from her fits of the pouts, or to express either surprise or regret at her abrupt distemperature.

But the Duchess was not only afflicted, on the present occasion, with one of her most distressing attacks of sulky resignation, but had summoned Lady Barringhurst and Lady Grayfield to be the witnesses of her sufferings. The Duke augured but ill for his own peace, when he found that the mysterious trio had been closeted in Anastasia’s boudoir during the whole of the morning; and taking courage from a persuasion that her Grace would exert some command over her temper in the presence of her female friends, he presented himself suddenly among them, to acquaint his oppressed wife that his cabriolet was at the door;—and that as the society of Lady Barringhurst and of his sister would ensure her from a solitary dinner, he should take a cutlet at the Travel-

lers' with his friend Mr. Russell, in order to be in time for the overture of *Il Pirata*.

"If you have made no very urgent engagement with your friend, and if your eagerness can bring itself to endure a few days of procrastination in this important matter, you would oblige me very much by remaining at home to-day," said the Duchess, with the most provoking air of humility.

"Certainly—certainly," replied the Duke, with great good-humour. "I am proud to find that my company is regarded as any thing better than importunate by your little sociable party."

"Sociable!—I fear you will find us a very insufficient substitute for the wit of Mr. Conversation-Russell, and the modest refinement of Lady Rachel Verney! Neither Lady Grayfield nor myself are skilled in the sort of flippant repartee which you prize in my sister, Lady Robert, and adore in Lady Cosmo Somerset and the Willinghams;—and as to poor dear Lady Barringhurst, Heaven knows that the state of *her* spirits is very little calculated to indulge in the levity with which Lady Rachel

Verney and your fashionable friends are apt to enliven their discourse."

The Duchess ostentatiously pressed the hand of her afflicted companion, as she uttered these words; and both Charlotte and Lady Barringhurst tenderly echoed the profound sigh with which she concluded her harangue. All three appeared intent on being miserable;—with elevated eyebrows, depressed mouths, and downcast eyes, they sat like statues of patience; and the Duke of Lisborough trembled as he thought upon the evening that awaited him, among these dispirited and uncommunicative females! He did not, however, dare to rebel; and even had Anastasia been Chaucer's Wife of Bath herself, redeemed from the grave, he could not have listened with humbler forbearance to the sage axioms touching the cruelty of husbands, and the unprincipled inhumanity of the whole masculine race, with which he was favoured during dinner by his wife and her guests. Something was evidently wrong;—yet he had not courage to inquire by what accident Lady Barringhurst chanced to be unaccompanied by her Lord or by his daughters. He was aware there

must have been “a quarrel;—but nothing wherefore;” and the poor Duke grew desperate, when the lateness of the hour compelled him to call for coffee, and adjourn to the boudoir and its inhabitants.

The three ladies, who had been engaged in earnest argument on his approach, affected to subdue themselves into silence as he entered; and finding his utmost efforts vain to engage them in conversation, he took up a number of the Edinburgh Review, and ensconcing himself in a *fauteuil*, either seemed or strove to read, in order to disguise his impatience of their peevish affectation. But he had not courage to break the spell and fly off to the Opera; he felt at once the irksomeness of the chain, and his own insufficiency to rend it asunder.

An awful silence ensued—broken only by an occasional whisper among the female martyrs, still more awful; and the Duke was beginning to feel as if an invisible chain had been flung around him to bind him to his schoolboy seat of punishment, and to become mightily ashamed of the ridiculous humiliation of his position—when the Groom of the Chambers suddenly

announced "Lord Barringhurst." The Duke of Lisborough joyfully hastened to welcome this opportune arrival; but during the moment of his delay in the anteroom, a strange degree of confusion had been evident among the allied forces; and he had overheard both the Duchess and Lady Grayfield whisper to their coadjutrix, "Now—now—is your moment for firmness."

Lord Barringhurst having paid his compliments with his accustomed air of dignified indifference to the Duke and Duchess, turned abruptly, but not ungraciously, towards his wife; observing "I have brought the carriage, Milicent, to take you home;—I fear it is late."

"Thank you," replied Lady Barringhurst, assuming a tone of magnanimous disdain, "but I have just promised my friend, the Duchess, to *sleep* here to-night; we intend passing to-morrow at Ebury."

"I trust you will alter that determination," said Lord Barringhurst with gentle gravity, "when I make it my particular request that you will accompany me home."

Lady Barringhurst appeared staggered by the seriousness of his air; but an encouraging

glance from her privy counsellors urged her to still further resistance.

“On some occasions, I trust, I may be allowed to consult my own comfort and respectability.”

“Milicent!” said Lord Barringhurst, accepting the seat which he had hitherto declined, “I came not hither with any unkind feelings towards you;—I entertain no resentment against yourself or your advisers. But I have been already too deep a sufferer from want of energy in my domestic conduct, to pass over your resistance on the present occasion. Do not leave the room, my dear Duke! I wish you to be the witness of an explanation which Lady Barringhurst has chosen to render public; I may, perhaps, avail myself hereafter of your testimony, that I have employed no harsh methods in the expression of my displeasure.”

Lady Barringhurst now began to look alarmed; but Anastasia’s contracted countenance assumed an air of haughty defiance.

“You could scarcely expect to find me under your roof,” said Lady Barringhurst, with a sort of apologizing deprecation, “after you had broken your promise to me, and sanctioned the

clandestine visits of your daughters in a quarter most offensive to my feelings.”

“Whatever measures I might have thought proper to sanction, I expected to find my wife acquiescent in their execution. I expected, Milicent, to find her fulfilling her accustomed duties in our common home; and you must make up your mind either to return there this night—or to return there no more.”

Lady Barringhurst started! But her female prompters, although they pursed up their mouths with an air of indignant displeasure, no longer ventured to encourage her to opposition. The Duchess, in particular, was furious that so vile an example of matrimonial tyranny should have been offered to the submissive Lisborough.

“You are displeased,” continued Lord Barringhurst, “that I have permitted an interview to take place between my daughters and their mother, in opposition to your own opinions. Permit me to recapitulate the arguments by which my own disinclination to the measure was shaken by my young friend, Mr. Willingham; and which you disdained to hear, in explanation, this morning.”

The Duchess made a gesture expressive of impatience and disgust.

“Your Grace will excuse me for thus intruding my family affairs on your notice; but as Lady Barringhurst’s friend, I feel secure of your indulgence.”

Anastasia, astonished by the rebuke, was not yet daunted in spirit. “Pray, speak on, my Lord,” said she, haughtily. “I am anxious to learn in what manner that mighty orator, Mr. Willingham, contrived to persuade you of the worthiness of the lady in question to become the companion of the Miss Barringhursts.”

“By satisfying me of my own unworthiness;—by proving to me, Madam, that the errors of the unfortunate Lucy arose solely from my own!” Lord Barringhurst uttered these trying words without agitation; but his face was pale as death, and his voice concentrated into a tone of the deepest pathos.

“When I became the husband of one of the noblest and loveliest women in England,” he resumed, after a brief pause, “my gratitude for her affection, my sense of conjugal duty, ought to have rendered her interests paramount in

my estimation. Yet, under a mistaken feeling of responsibility to the public, and to my country—I neglected my own household—I absented myself from my happy home—I estranged my heart from the mother of my children—from the wife of my choice. I *knew* that libertines were welcomed within my doors, yet uttered no remonstrance;—I was aware that the attractive and licentious were my frequent guests—yet I strove not to forewarn my lovely Lucy by one reproving word !”

Again Lord Barringhurst paused;—and a pin might have been heard to fall in the chamber; so deep was the sympathy of his auditors, in the dignified command he laboured to exercise over his emotions.

“ Even when the indiscretions of Mr. Tichborne and his cousin had been pointed out to me, Milicent, by your own interposition, I forbore to exercise the degree of firmness becoming the occasion. Occupied by my ambitious projects or selfish pursuits, I slighted my wife—overlooked her attachment to another; nor vouchsafed to bestow my attention on the subject, until a dread of the compromise of my

honour in the eyes of the world, prompted me to acts of violence which only served to ensure the eventual ruin of their hitherto innocent object. Lady Barringhurst became the prey of a libertine—and the world pronounced me to be an injured man; I divorced her—and the world declared me to be a just one!—”

Lord Barringhurst involuntarily clasped his hands together.

“By this public act of repudiation, my cause was fully avenged; and I satisfied my conscience, meanwhile, by the belief that a woman who had been lawfully put away as an adulteress, can maintain no further claim upon the affection of her children. In this resolution, Milicent, I was fortified, by your representations of poor Lucy’s degradation as the avowed paramour of Henry Tichborne;—a point on which you deceived me, or were yourself deceived.”

“It is not to be supposed,” observed the Duchess, coldly, “that the movements and engagements of persons so disgracefully situated, should be very accurately ascertained among the virtuous part of the community.”

“True,” replied Lord Barringhurst. “Nor

can such persons be supposed to remain objects of interest, saving unto those with whom their days of innocence were passed in the happy interchange of affection; or unto those who believe themselves to have been instrumental in their fall. Your Grace must pardon me for assuring you that no man can wholly estrange from his recollection, the wife who has lain in his bosom! And, however you may despise me for the confession, I acknowledge that my heart was gladdened and reassured by the intelligence imparted to me by Mr. Willingham, this morning, that Lucy Tichborne has been as distinguished by the humbleness of her penitence, as by the flagrancy of her offence."

"Mr. Willingham may perhaps be a partial judge," observed Lady Grayfield, maliciously.

"Lady Robert Lorton—one of the most discerning and virtuous of her sex—was, in this instance, his authority; and to her earnest entreaties that I would permit a single—a final interview—between her dying friend and my daughters, she added a proposal of being present at the meeting. Rejoiced to offer some expiation to one whose errors I cannot but trace to my own

injudicious carelessness, I acquiesced in Lady Robert's wishes, without insulting Lady Barringhurst by any further allusion to a topic distressing to her feelings; and Lucy and Georgiana accompanied her ladyship this morning to —— to —— the presence of their miserable mother."

"At least there can be no occasion for a repetition of the visit," observed the Duchess. "Having satisfied your conscience by this concession, your lordship surely cannot contemplate a repetition of this very equivocal measure."

"On this point, Milicent," said Lord Barringhurst, turning towards his wife, "your apprehensions may subside. My daughters are secure from future corruption—yourself from further irritation!—*Lucy is dead!*"

All present uttered an exclamation of horror; and the females of the party began to think that they had carried their pharisaical animosity towards the offender a little too far.

"My daughters will remain this night and to-morrow under the protection of Lady Robert Lorton, that they may not offend you by the

sight of their tears ; or the opinion of the world, by their respect to the memory of one who, with all her faults, was a tender mother to their childhood. On the following day, Lucy's remains will be laid by the side of her father, in his family vault ; and with them, be all our resentments—all our unpleasing remembrances—buried for ever. *You*, Milicent, must assist me, as a good wife should, in the task of forgetting my former grievances."

He held out his hand affectionately as he spoke : and Lady Barringhurst, touched by his affliction, and moved by his kindness, gratefully accepted the pledge. After all, her better nature rendered her but a poor scholar to the harsh and aristocratic coldness of Lady Grayfield—who despised her for this act of feeble compliance.

But if Milicent's feelings were overcome by the mournful intelligence imparted by her Lord, those of the Duke of Lisborough were far more earnestly excited by the lofty sternness of purpose he had exhibited in his adjustment of the affair. Lord Barringhurst's conduct had sufficed to place his own in the meanest and most

paltry light. He now felt thoroughly ashamed of his subjection to Anastasia's whims, and resolved to disburden himself henceforward of her yoke; and the Duchess, in marking the altered expression of his countenance, perceived at once that the reign of terror was at an end—that her kingdom had been taken from her! She could not disguise her vexation and discomposure; and when her guests had departed, she made a hasty retreat into her dressing-room, lest the Duke should break forth into a verbal declaration of future independence.

The daughters, who were weeping over their mother's coffin—Lady Robert, who was grieving beside the remains of her friend—Milicent Barringhurst, who was moistening her pillow with the bitter tears of remorse—may be imagined to have passed the ensuing night in sleepless sorrow: but the restlessness of the Duchess of Lisborough outpassed their own. Mortified, perplexed, and alarmed—she endured all the tortures prepared for a malicious temper in its first moment of defeat.

CHAPTER XII.

A young unmarried man with a good name
And fortune, has an awkward part to play ;
For good society is but a game
“The royal game of goose” as I may say—
Where every body has some separate aim,
An end to answer or a plan to lay—
The single ladies wishing to be double.

Byron.

“AND so you really think of walking into the springe with your eyes open !” said Lord Lorimer to Sir Comyne Wallace, as they lounged together over the newspapers at the Travellers’ Club. “After all your former admonitory dissertations to me upon the interested views and heartless character of the Willinghams, you really think of honouring the fair Eleanor with your hand !”

"I suppose you wish to ascertain, in the words of our Scottish bard,

How your old shoon fit on my shachled feet?"

"I am only sorry to find you struggling in a pitfall, which your forewarnings enabled me to escape."

"No! my dear fellow! I do *not* struggle in my chains; trust me, I am well aware that resistance serves but to tighten the links. I resign myself patiently to my destiny; believing, on mature deliberation, that Eleanor and myself, without having any chance of becoming the happiest of human beings, are likely to run the ordinary course of human life, with a tolerable likelihood of adding to our mutual comfort."

"A very sober and moderate expectation!"

"And therefore trustworthy!—During his days of youthful enthusiasm, every man promises himself a career of perfect happiness—of stainless respectability—of matchless honour. We flatter ourselves that the world will reform itself for our sake;—we anticipate a faultless monster in our future bride; and cheat ourselves with the expectation that the even current

of our destinies will flow over sands of gold !— Alas ! the first self-deception we are compelled to resign, becomes a bitter trial to our fortitude ! but one after another, we see these cherished visions fade away ; we inure ourselves to the degree of mediocrity which is our allotted portion ;—and finally learn to be contented with such dirty scraps as the charity of fortune throws in our way. I do not uphold Eleanor Willingham as a model of womanly perfection, or as likely to make a pattern-wife ; but she *suits* me ; and I have no hesitation in owning to you, Lorimer, that I have serious thoughts of proposing to your old love.”

“ You will scarcely suppose that jealous or interested motives induce me to dissuade you from such a measure, when I confess that I am attached, and more than half engaged in another quarter ;—but I cannot bear to see you the prey of a determined match-hunter.”

“ You are not an impartial judge on this occasion ;—you cannot forget or forgive the coquettish caprices practised upon you by poor Eleanor. To myself, however, her conduct has been so uniformly kind and encouraging, that—”

“Doubtless—doubtless!—for she had her own object in view in the concession; she was kind and encouraging to *me*, till she had discovered the diminutive amount of my younger brother’s portion! Nay!—I entertain no doubt of renewing her kindness and encouragement to-morrow, if I chose to make the experiment.”

“I wish you *would* make the experiment, in order that your pride might be repressed, and my expectations gratified.”

“*Ça va!*” exclaimed Lord Lorimer, touching the hand of his friend. “As far as the devotion of a couple of days will serve your turn, I am at your service; but I have pleasures of my own to pursue, which are better than these plots. For the sake of my personal hopes elsewhere, I must ‘come, see, and conquer’ Miss Eleanor, without delay;—to-night, therefore, at Lady Radbourne’s ball, expect to find me your rival.”

“Here comes Basingstoke! Why do you not employ your rhetoric upon him?—Claudia, it is true, never practised her coquetries upon your boyhood; but she is surely as much of an establishment-hunter as her sister?”

“Far more so, in my opinion! But Basingstoke never was my monitor in a similar predicament; nor does he, at present, need any warning of mine. His proposals were yesterday accepted, by Lord Barringhurst, for his youngest daughter.”

“Impossible!—quite impossible. My dear Basingstoke, for pity’s sake, resolve me this mystery!—The world wants to marry you in a great hurry;—do you forbid the bans?”

“By no means—unless you have prior pretensions to urge against me;—I am weary of flirting and folly; and nothing can be more true than that I am about to try the old English diet of love and home, by retiring to Basingstoke Manor—”

“With Claudia Willingham?—I said so!”

“With Miss Willingham? A pretty sort of home, and a very satisfactory species of love you would assign me!—Like the hunted beaver in the fable, I should throw my coronet at her and run away, rather than fall into her hands. I am far too vain to have any fancy for finding my patent and my rent-roll preferred before my own attractions.”

“But you have always appeared to admire Claudia—you were constantly at the house.”

“Admire her?—of course!—Who could look at her lovely face without admiration? I consider the beauty and accomplishments of the Willinghams—set forth as they are by lavish display—to be the property of society at large. I bestow my applause and interest upon them, as I would upon some finished actress; and I have been, as you say, a constant loungeur in Lady Maria’s house, because I have been constantly invited there, and have uniformly found it a pleasant resort.”

“Nevertheless, I suspect you will find your defection resented as an injury by the family.”

“Perhaps so; but believe me, it will be on insufficient grounds. Never have I uttered one syllable, which could give them reason to believe I had any matrimonial views in seeking their society. Claudia, on the contrary, has constantly rallied me on my supposed attachment to Lady Clara Radbourne; while Lady Maria Willingham herself, being on intimate terms with the Barringhursts, must have been fully aware of my attentions in that quar-

ter. And now, good bye; for I am engaged to ride with Georgiana at three; and I am not inclined to forfeit one moment of the privilege."

"I wish him joy of this lukewarm love, and humdrum home," said Sir Comyne, as Lord Basingstoke left the room. "For my part, I should expect to find myself converted into a mass of millefleurs ice, were I to marry the pupil of such a precisian as Lady Barringhurst the second."

"While *I* should apprehend more danger in becoming the son of such a latitudinarian as Lady Barringhurst the first!"

"How, then, have you reconciled your uneasy conscience to your union with Miss De Vesci? How shall you like such a world-mongering semi-sinner, semi-saint, as Lady Maria—for your mother-in-law?"

"Miss De Vesci?—Lady Maria? Oh! are you *there*, my dear Wallace!" replied Lord Lorimer, laughing. "Do you really suppose that I have enacted my part of guardian, like the graybeard Don of some Spanish farce; and appropriated my rich and lovely ward to my unworthy self?"

“ Her sisters believe in your engagement.”

“ So they do in Basingstoke’s attachment to Claudia ; but they might extend their scepticism to both instances.”

“ Do you really assure me that you have no thoughts of allying yourself to the Willingham family ?” inquired Sir Comyne earnestly, as they had now reached the hall, and were about to separate.

“ I have said no such thing,” answered Lorimer, still laughing, as he jumped upon his horse. “ On the contrary, I am now on my road home to obtain my mother’s consent to my union with—Miss Willingham. Wish me success—keep my secret—and fare you well.”

With wonderstruck consternation, Sir Comyne Wallace stood watching his departure till he turned the corner of St. James’s-street ; then, slowly following his track, he ascended that mighty thoroughfare of the vagrancy of fashion, wholly abstracted from the interests of the passing scene ; and much marvelling whether Lord Lorimer had returned from Naples in a condition worthy of a strait-waistcoat, or deserving to be shot through the heart for treachery

towards himself. During the remainder of the day, he continued to puzzle his mind with guesses as to the sanity of his friend; but, when he entered Lady Radbourne's resplendent ball-room at night, and detected Lorimer in the act of whispering tender nothingness into the ear of his own Eleanor, he was inclined to overlook his morning's invitation to that effect; and to resent at once his lordship's attentions, and Miss Willingham's cordial acceptance of his devotion.

Irritated by the fickleness of Eleanor, and resolved to satisfy himself beyond the power of misconception, he advanced towards the guilty pair, who were seated on a sofa in the deep embrasure of a window, and engaged in a most determined flirtation. But the lady, who on all previous occasions, and on every other night of the week, could espy him amid the crowd from the first moment of his entrance, now grew so wondrously near-sighted, that she fixed her listless eyes upon his countenance without a single symptom of recognition. But Sir Comyne would not be thus easily baffled; he placed himself before her—and was rewarded by a calm languid smile of notice; he

claimed her hand for the next quadrille—for the following *galoppe*—for the ensuing waltz; and was refused with polite equivocation upon every renewed attempt. He turned indignantly away, from an apprehension of encountering Lord Lorimer's triumphant glances; for, alas! the fatal fact was now only too evident!—His day of favour was past and gone;—the Baronet was forced to cede his place to the Baron; and Frederick was now all in all with the calculating Eleanor. It was not, however, the lover of her youth whom she preferred; it was Lord Lorimer, who appeared too good a match to be neglected!

Poor Sir Comyne walked too and fro during the remainder of the ball, occasionally watching the offending couple, and unceasingly pitying himself as the most injured of mankind. Early on the following morning he betook himself to Mr. Willingham's snuggerly in the Albany (he had been the successor to Sir William Wyndham's bachelor tenement), in order to give vent to his ill-humour; and to obtain, if possible, some further insight into the motives of Lord Lorimer's extraordinary behaviour.

But Charles, although as jealously disposed

as Wallace himself to put the most unfavourable construction on every action of their common friend and mutual enemy, became still more and more perplexed by this fresh instance of Frederick's volatility. His whole conduct was a tissue of mysteries; he was evidently attached to Mary—engaged to Minnie—and inclined to play the fool with Eleanor; and as brother to one party, and cousin to the other two, Mr. Willingham felt himself entitled to demand some further explanation on the subject. With friendly sympathy he promised Sir Comyne to set his mind at ease by acquainting him with the result. But the irritated Wallace professed himself to be perfectly indifferent on the subject, excepting as it concerned his future intimacy with Lord Lorimer; for however Frederick might frame his own vindication, the treachery of Eleanor Willingham was undeniably apparent; she had been ready, on the slightest invitation, to withdraw her smiles from one whose disinterested regard she had long affected to favour, in order to bestow them on some higher bidder. No! Eleanor was not to be forgiven!

It would have been better, perhaps, had Sir Comyne accepted Mr. Willingham's gratuitous offers of explanation upon this knotty point. Thanks to the cordial candour of Lord Lorimer in replying to the appeal of his friend, it proved to be equally luminous and satisfactory; for although Charles had very little reason to be surprised on learning that Frederick's attachment for his sister Mary had been of slow but undeviating growth, he was wonderfully astonished to find that Sir Joseph had already sanctioned Lord Lorimer's proposals; and that Miss Willingham herself had received them on the preceding evening with signal favour. Mary had not judged it necessary to acknowledge to her new lover, during how many years his affection had been painfully despaired of on her part; nor how truly she was satisfied it would suffice to form the happiness of her future life. She could scarcely be persuaded that Frederick's engagements with Miss de Vesci, had been a mere chimera of her own and her brother's imagination; but when he assured her that Minnie had long been the confidante of his love and of his projects—that during her resi-

dence at Naples she had confirmed them by her untiring details of cousin Mary's excellence, of cousin Mary's endowments, and, above all, of cousin Mary's faithful regard for his absent self—she could not repress her blushes and her amazement. She even blundered into a declaration that nothing but Minnie's previous attachment to Lord Stapylford, could account for her indifference towards her guardian; and for her disinterested promotion of his marriage with another.

“But is it possible,” exclaimed Lord Lorimer, too discreet to acknowledge how deeply he was gratified by this inadvertent inference, “is it possible that you still remain unaware of the state of Miss De Vesci's feelings with regard to Stapylford. Are you not yet in her confidence?”

“Perhaps I have too studiously avoided it. Notwithstanding all the flatteries you have been lavishing upon me for the last three hours, you must retain a sufficient remembrance of all the quarrels of our childhood, Frederick, to know that I am rich in all the failings of my sex—in envy, and jealousy, and—”

“In jealousy! Dearest Mary—*will* you, *do*

you gratify me by insinuating that you were jealous of my supposed attachment to your cousin?"

"A little;—a very little!" replied Miss Willingham, with a smiling blush." I thought it strangely ungrateful, considering that the constancy of mine was suffered to pass unregarded."

"My own dear Mary!—may the devotion of my whole life serve to repair even the semblance of such a fault!"

"And then I was disposed to be equally envious and jealous on Charles's account; whom I have long believed to be secretly devoted to—but I have no right to give utterance to these vague suggestions of my own fancy."

"Pray go on!—I am more interested than you can imagine to learn your opinions on this subject. Besides—I have now a claim to participate in all your thoughts—ay! dear Mary, in all your most secret thoughts. Tell me then, have you any reason for supposing that your brother is attached to my ward?"

"No *reason*, perhaps; but it is a folly which strangely possesses my mind. Charles's doubts and misgivings respecting Minnie's engage-

ments with Lord Stapylford appear to distract him."

"Not more so than they distract herself," said Lord Lorimer, half aside; and it was but a few hours after this interview, that Mr. Willingham sought the explanation prompted by Sir Comyne Wallace, which terminated so perfectly to his own satisfaction and to that of his friend.

"But tell me, Frederick," observed Charles Willingham, after having warmly expressed his delight in the prospect of a brotherly connexion with Lord Lorimer, "tell me whence could have arisen all my strange misconceptions on this occasion."

"From an obliquity of mental vision."

"But surely I overheard you refer, in conversation with Monsieur de Béthizy, to some engagement on the part of my cousin?"

"Certainly! to an engagement with Lord Stapylford;—you cannot be ignorant of its existence."

"Of its continuance, I was willing to remain in doubt."

"Without violating the confidence of my

ward, I may at least inform you that her sentiments on this head are only too delicately scrupulous. Upon her unexpected accession of fortune, she empowered me to write to Lord Stapylford, acquainting him with the fact; and begging an immediate explanation of his intentions. We are just now anxiously waiting the return of the India fleet in order to learn the result of my communication."

Mr. Willingham almost ground his teeth with vexation at the idea of Miss De Vesci's thus courting the acceptance of her recreant lover! That Minnie, with all her loveliness, with all her good gifts, and all their worldly enhancement, should thus sue for the tardy fulfilment of a degrading engagement, was indeed incomprehensible!

"And can you believe," persisted he, "that the affections of my cousin are really engaged in this inauspicious connexion?—If I could persuade myself that Minnie truly loved Lord Stapylford, or that so selfish a dog—so mean—so contemptible a fellow could render her happy—I would reconcile myself to the event. Resolve my doubts, Lorimer! do you think that

Miss De Vesci is seriously attached to the man she seeks as her husband?"

"My dear, good Charles!—your warmth is unbecomingly prone to epithets this morning; and you do me injustice in supposing that I would betray the trust reposed in my discretion. I have told you more than enough; and now let me go back to the drawing-room and talk to your sister. Remember that I have been parted from her these two years; and that whether Minnie is, or is not attached to that *vaurien* Lord Stapylford, my own affection for Mary Willingham is as fervent as it is faithful."

"Thank Heaven, there is at least some prospect of happiness among us!" muttered Mr. Willingham, in reply. And he took up his hat to travel towards Westminster, with a mind very little disposed to cogitate over the interests of the nation, as discussed in the High Court of Parliament of Great Britain.

CHAPTER XIII.

Wise or foolish before, we are all equally foolish in love ; the same froward, petulant, captious babies ! I protest we are very silly creatures all of us, in these circumstances ; and did not love make men as great fools as ourselves, they would hardly think us worthy of their pursuit. Yet I am so true to the freemasonry myself, that I would think the man who should dare to say half I have written of our *dollships*, ought not to go away with his life.—*Richardson's Grandison*.

MONSIEUR DE BETHIZY, intimately persuaded of the amiability of his own condescension in smiling upon a young person so totally unknown to fame as Miss Arabella Westland, and satisfied that she could not remain blind to her own good fortune in being thus undeservedly honoured, gave himself very little trouble in pursuing what he considered to be his courtship in Portland-place. He sometimes even feared that the "*pauvre petite*"—who by the

way was nearly as large as a bison—would be overcome by a sense of the vastness of the sacrifice he was making in her favour; and that she never would have courage to encounter the greatness he was willing to thrust upon her. He persuaded himself that the poor creature would certainly have taken refuge in Ophelia's remedy, had he continued to vibrate between his choice of herself or of Miss De Vesci; and being willing to put her out of her pain as soon as possible, he very cavalierly addressed his proposals to her father shortly after his explanation with Lord Lorimer.

Now Sir Thomas Westland was what is familiarly called in England "a bit of a humourist;" like many other vulgar persons, he had a singular tendency towards the jocose; and being tolerably aware of the true nature of Monsieur de Béthizy's views upon his daughter, he could not but be gratified with the opportunity of disappointing his cupidity. In the mean time he quite overlooked the fact that his interested speculations upon the forfeiture of Miss De Vesci's fortune, had first introduced the young Frenchman within his gates; and

believing his own eyes to be clear from mote or beam, he applied himself without hesitation to work the humiliation of Arabella's fortune-hunting suitor. Under pretence of consulting the other members of his family, he hastily summoned his nephew, Sir Richard, into their cabinet-council; being well aware that he was sentimentally engaged in another apartment, in rendering his *own* suit acceptable to the ears of his well-portioned cousin; and that he would be eager to resent the intrusion of the handsome *double* of the Duke of Saxe-Altenburg, into his self-appropriated territory.

Sir Thomas boldly proceeded to relate to his nephew, in Monsieur de Béthizy's presence, the honour destined to his Arabella, of patching the tattered escutcheons of the house of Béthizy with her solid English dowry; and affected to ask his advice as to the best method of inclining Miss Westland towards the prompt acceptance of so affable a proposition; and while Béthizy sat by, hugging himself in the grovelling folly of the old citizen, yet half ashamed to find him fix thus eagerly on the bait, Sir Thomas was slyly amusing himself by watching the gradual

swell of his nephew's dissatisfaction, and the final hurricane of indignation with which he marked his consciousness of the insult offered to their family in general by the young Parisian. Sir Richard Westland, as the co-guardian and frequent visitor of Miss De Vesci, had already found ample means of observing the manœuvres of Monsieur de Béthizy in Portman-square; and having at one time anticipated their success with the lovely heiress, he had learned to detest the interposing object which had seemed likely to frustrate the marriage with Lord Stapylford, a measure on the probability of which the Westlands still continued to ground their hopes of inheritance. But this disgust might have been regarded as affection, compared with that which followed Sir Richard's detection of his personal views upon Arabella!

Monsieur de Béthizy was one of those fortunate individuals who find it difficult to believe that any one can be inclined to insult, or molest, or disparage their proper person. It is true that when a *real* offence was offered, he was most irritably disposed to resent the ineq-

lence of the offender ; but in a thousand instances his self-love induced him to misinterpret the intentions of his adversaries. For a long time he continued to reply to the irony of old Sir Thomas by bows, and smiles, and entreaties that he would not rate too highly the honour of his proffered alliance ; and even to the preliminary grumblings of Sir Richard he answered with amazing condescension. But before any final explanation had occurred between the parties, Lord Lorimer—who had business to transact with the Westlands on behalf of Miss De Vesci—entered Sir Thomas’s library ; and Monsieur de Béthizy, perceiving that the two gentlemen were about to waive the termination of his own affairs as a matter of delicacy towards himself, assured them that “ Lorimare ” was his best friend, and that he should be extremely happy to make him one of their counsellors on the present occasion.

“ I see no object in extending the knowledge of your *conduct*, Sir, or of your disappointment,” replied Sir Richard, with a sneer.

“ Am I to understand, Béthizy, that you have made an application for the hand of Miss

Westland?" inquired Lord Lorimer, with a demure suppression of his risibility.

"Monsieur de Béthizy has done us that honour," replied Sir Thomas, who began to entertain more respect towards the young stranger, on finding Lord Lorimer to be his intimate friend. "But I fear the attachment existing between my daughter and her cousin Richard will deprive me of the distinction of——"

"Distinction!" interrupted the ill-bred Sir Richard. "A distinction which Arabella has received in common with half a dozen other young ladies of equal fortune! Commend me to the delicacy of an attachment which depends solely upon the portion of the bride."

"Do you mean to insinuate," retorted Béthizy, "that my views upon Miss Westland——"

"And upon Miss De Vesci, Lady Mary Talbot, and Lady Bontein, have all been equally interested. You must pardon me, Sir, for observing that I consider the method in which French marriages are arranged among persons

of condition, to be very unworthy of imitation in our own country."

"I never was guilty of shooting a gentleman of *his* tone and dimensions," said Béthizy half aside to Lord Lorimer, directing a shrug of contemptuous pity towards Sir Richard Westland. "I leave such animals to the *abattoir*; nor have I any thought of breaking a lance in honour of a pre-engaged lady."

Sir Thomas, who had been greatly displeased by his nephew's violence, was now moved by Monsieur de Béthizy's impertinent air of superiority to second the charge. "You must allow us to believe, Sir, that the tribute of personal respect and esteem is due to any lady whom you seek in marriage. By rendering that holy institution a mere matter of traffic and barter, you degrade both the altar and yourself. Yes, Sir, you must allow us to believe that we manage these matters better in England."

"I shall grant you no such concession," replied Béthizy, without losing his temper or his countenance. "I maintain, on the contrary, that the English nation is disgraced, in its

female branches, by the manner in which matrimonial speculations are pursued in London. You have alluded to the conventional marriages of my own country—you call them interested, and indelicate;—but what will you say in defence of a system which induces you to educate your daughters solely with a view to their future advancement?—You bring them into society—allow them to converse, and dance with, and pass whole hours leaning upon the arm of a comparative stranger, in order that they may put forth their attractions, and allure some man of importance into the snare. You initiate them into all those arguments of sordid interest by which the pure mind of youth should be wholly untainted; you give them permission to choose for themselves at an age when their own judgment cannot but prove a dangerous pilot; yet when their choice is made, you deign to sanction it only so far as your mature worldly wisdom may suggest. And this you call disinterestedness and delicacy in the affairs of the heart!”

“Nay! my dear Béthizy,” exclaimed Lord Lorimer, “pray do not suppose that all our

marriages are thus arranged, or that all English women are actuated by similar principles."

"I speak only of the class of society in which I move; and I am sure you will not deny that such girls as the Willinghams, and fifty others of equal notoriety, are as decidedly fortune-hunters as any adventurer or *Chevalier d'industrie* upon record! In my opinion nothing can exceed the gross indelicacy of a custom which sends forth young and lovely women to dispose of themselves to the best advantage; while our Parisian system leaves all the sin of sordid calculation with the parents—to whose old age avarice is a far less disgraceful distemper."

Sir Thomas Westland was unprovided with a reply of sufficient toughness and plausibility to be audibly uttered; and Sir Richard, who was half inclined to be pugnacious, but who felt afraid of provoking Monsieur de Béthizy's sarcastic and self-possessed impertinence, also maintained a sulky silence while the Parisian terminated his harangue.

"For my own part I am far from wishing to conceal that I am not sufficiently rich to select

a portionless wife;—that I am, in fact, anxious to ally myself with a woman of fortune;—I must otherwise remain in solitary blessedness to the end of my days. But I have something to offer in exchange for the thousands you value so highly;—an ancient name—parchments which reach from hence to the deluge—a tolerable person and a tolerable degree of acceptance in society—good sense, good temper, good health, and good breeding. I do not ask you, gentlemen, to appreciate these advantages;—I am aware that they are commodities foreign to your commerce; but in taking my leave, I beg to suggest that you may hereafter find the fair Arabella inclined to regret their loss.”

With a smiling bow of splendid disdain, Monsieur de Béthizy left the gorgeous apartment of the astonished banker, in order to pursue his fortunes elsewhere; kissing his forefinger to Lord Lorimer as he passed, and whistling Rossini's Tyrolian as he jumped into his cabriolet.

Lord Lorimer's errand with the Westlands was despatched without further reference to the speculative propensities of his Parisian friend.

He was anxious to obtain certain signatures and certain concessions from his co-trustee, previous to the departure of Miss De Vesci for Bensleigh Park ; whither she was about to retire for the summer months, accompanied by her mother and sisters. The announcement of Lord Basingstoke's ensuing marriage with Miss Barringhurst, and of his own with the gentle Mary Willingham, had in fact struck a finishing blow upon the expectations of Claudia and her sister. Even Sir Comyne Wallace, undeceived by his skilful exposition of Eleanor's cold-hearted policy, had withdrawn his assiduities ; and thus, at the close of another season, and after more than their usual eagerness of manœuvring and allurements, they found themselves further than ever from the momentous goal they had believed to be securely attained on the present occasion. Lady Robert Lorton, profoundly affected by the death of her unfortunate friend, and somewhat moderated in her regard towards the Willinghams, by observing that during her secession from the pleasures of the world their attentions were considerably relaxed, had left London for Lord

Robert's Buckinghamshire seat; where she trusted to remain unmolested by the Duchess of Lisborough's malicious comments, and by the intrusion of the Lady Wroxtons and Lady Radbournes, whose influence had proved so baneful to the unhappy Lucy. Her last visit of adieu was made to Mary Willingham, in gratitude for an interposition which she felt to have been most consolatory to the parting moments of her friend.

"I leave you at the summit of mortal happiness, my dear Miss Willingham," said she. "Time and absence, in trying the strength of your affection, have proved its worthiness; you possess at once all the happy associations of an early attachment—of a first love—and all the confidence arising from a maturer choice. The love by which your course has been guided has proved no blindfold Cupid; yet I venture to predict him a deity whose altars are sacred to happiness."

"Thank you—thank you!"—replied Mary, blushing to hear her sentiments thus positively defined. "I believe—I trust—that my prospects are not the less bright for having been

tardily developed. It is something, even at six-and-twenty, to have attained the accomplishment of our dearest wishes."

"*Something* indeed!" replied Lady Robert, musingly; "for I know no human destiny more promising, more honourable, than your own. You have lingered in your home beyond the usual allotment of a woman's fate, and so as to achieve a perfect fulfilment of filial duty:—you have closed the eyes of one parent, and have ministered to the happiness of the survivor with the tenderest patience. Your brother—a discerning judge—regards you with no less reverence than affection; and even your cousins—without the courage to imitate them—respect your virtues. You have strictly restrained within your own bosom every demonstration of those emotions which other women assume as an embellishment—yet you are about to be united to the object of your earliest and tenderest affection!—You have shrunk from those displays by which other women attempt to secure a matrimonial establishment—yet you are about to form an alliance of the most brilliant description. The family of your future

husband warmly acknowledge their gratification in seeing you become Lord Lorimer's wife; while in his mother you possess at once an amiable and enlightened companion, and the friend of your own free choice. What can mortal woman wish for more?"

"You are just in your estimate of my good fortune!" exclaimed Mary, touched almost to tears, "although you so flatteringly exaggerate the qualities by which you would teach me to believe myself entitled to the favours of Providence. But do not threaten me with a prospect so alarming as that of uninterrupted sunshine, or I shall believe myself to be singled out for some terrible reverse."

"Make yourself easy on that head; I shall easily discover some thorn concealed among your roses, which may save you the apprehension of a conflagration at Lorimer Hall, or of Frederick's elopement with an opera dancer. Your brother—for instance;—I am by no means satisfied about your brother."

"Indeed!" said Mary, gazing with an anxious eye and heightened complexion upon her visitor. "What evil can you possibly anticipate

on Charles's account?—Surely his prospects are as bright as my own?”

“ I grant you that his temporal prospects are hopeful; for he has acquired, by his own abilities and principles, a degree of public consideration commensurate with the noble inheritance he derives from his forefathers. No one stands on a higher point of personal dignity than Mr. Willingham.”

“ Perhaps you think his manners too reserved, his character too grave, for popularity in general society?”

“ Towards the stereotype opinion of that common-place thing called ‘ general society,’ I conclude him to be as indifferent as myself. In his own circle, he is worshipped ;—when ever he is at the pains of discovering himself, your brother cannot fail of being beloved. Throughout this unhappy affair of poor Lucy's, I cannot describe to you the delicacy, the judgment, the gentleness of feeling with which Mr. Willingham has conciliated all parties ; I have been forced into constant collision with him, and I can hardly express the grateful interest which moves my remembrance of his

kindness, in negotiating between Lord Barrington and myself in all the melancholy intricacies of the business. But, as I said before, I am not satisfied on his account."

"You alarm me!—I have observed of late that Charles has been wretchedly out of spirits—and Frederick has noticed a considerable alteration in his appearance. I trust you do not think his health has been seriously affected by his unintermitted devotion to public business?"

"On the contrary, I suspect it is some *private* business which is preying upon his mind."

"Dear Lady Robert—surely——"

"Nay! do not alarm yourself! I have no clue to the mystery; and even my conjectures are not of a very terrific description.—I believe him to be desperately in love."

"Indeed!" said Mary, greatly relieved. "Then I shall not agitate myself with any violent apprehensions!—I know by experience that even a hopeless attachment is not a mortal disorder; and I cannot believe that a person so excellent, and so highly-gifted as my brother, will sigh in vain. But why should you imagine

that a man of his serious and sober character is the victim to a sentimental passion?"

"In the first place, I have witnessed the determined self-control with which he has resisted all the cunning overtures of Lady Radbourne, and all the still more perilous advances of her beautiful daughter. Believe me, they have left no effort unattempted to make him their own."

"I fancy Charles entertains a view of the duties and affections of wedded life, very different from any that could be afforded by an union with so fashionable a belle as Lady Clara Radbourne."

"There I perfectly agree with you. But Lucy Barringhurst is scarcely less lovely—far more accomplished; and has been educated in every respect with a view to the domestic happiness he prizes so highly. Now I happened to be present on the occasion of your brother's congratulations to Lord Barringhurst on Georgiana's engagement with Basingstoke; and I scarcely know whether I felt more surprised by his lordship's insinuation that Mr. Willingham himself would prove more acceptable to him as

a son-in-law than any man in England ; or by Charles's embarrassment, and studious avoidance of encouraging the project. From that hour to this, I am persuaded he has never exchanged a syllable with Lucy Barringhurst."

"But his coldness towards one young lady offers very slight evidence of his attachment to another."

"Very true ! and his avoidance of Lucy I ascribe simply to indifference. But there exists another, whose presence he shuns with still more determined circumspection, and on very different grounds ;—one too, from whose society he has no *right* to absent himself unless from two motives—one or other of which must certainly instigate his conduct ;—*love* or *hatred*."

"Hatred ! my dear Lady Robert ! Do you suppose that Charles, or any other man, could *hate* a person so captivating as Minnie ?"

"Ah ! you have betrayed yourself and him ! Your consciousness of my meaning assures me that I have guessed rightly on the present occasion."

"I will candidly own that my recent conjectures lead to a similar conclusion ; but I am

not in his secret. My brother probably imagines that Lord Lorimer's authority with my cousin has placed me in her confidence; for although he knows how deeply—in common with all Miss De Vesci's friends—I lament her engagement to Lord Stapylford, yet he has never alluded to the subject, or mentioned Minnie's name in my presence since Frederick's return to England.”—

“He has acted with his usual delicacy. But must I imitate his discretion?—May I not inquire whether your cousin persists in her girlish attachment?”

“Nay!—You see her nearly as often as myself; and can as well determine.”

“At least you will tell me whether she considers herself engaged to the cold-hearted spendthrift, who has proved himself so undeserving of her love?”

“I fear she does; and to own the truth, we are in immediate apprehension of Lord Stapylford's arrival. Minnie would have remained in town to be present at my marriage with her guardian, but that the India fleet is hourly expected; and Lorimer wished her to be

safe at Bensleigh till all the difficulties of the business are at an end."

"You acknowledge, then, that there *are* difficulties?"

"Do not ask me to be more explicit; time, I trust, will develop the affair to the satisfaction of all our friends; in the mean time, my brother remains as much in the dark as yourself."

"Poor Mr. Willingham!—I can now account for his sallow looks and desponding speeches!—Well! since you will not admit me further into the mystery, I must limit my interest in it to watching the weathercock on the turret of the Lorton House offices; and to praying for winds and tides favourable to the arrival of the India fleet. Pray put me out of my pain by giving me good tidings, as soon as the event will allow. I do not insist that the letter should be signed with the name of WILLINGHAM; but I trust that Mary, the writer, will condescend to subscribe herself as my 'affectionate friend.'"

CHAPTER XIV.

Les femmes se préparent pour leurs amants, si elles les attendent ; mais si elles en sont surprises, elles oublient à leur arrivée l'état où elles se trouvent—elles ne se voient plus. Elles ont plus de loisir avec les indifférents ; elles sentent le désordre où elles sont, s'ajustent en leur présence, ou disparaissent un moment, et reviennent parées.—*La Bruyère.*

It was a golden evening towards the end of August, and the setting sun was streaming in glorious effulgence through the entangled boughs of the beechen avenue of Bensleigh Park. A slight sprinkling of rain in the afternoon had brought back the freshness of verdure and fragrance of atmosphere distinguishing the earlier summer; and although among the adjoining farms, the stubble whence the redundant shocks of corn had been recently removed, gave visible tokens of the advanced progress of the year, extensive fields of purple clover, flushed

with bloom and overcharged with sweetness, still spoke of the genial maturity of the season. It was, in short, one of those delicious snatches of weather, which intervene between summer and autumn, partaking of the softness of the one, and the mellow richness of the other. The blackbirds poured forth their evening song among shrubberies fashioned according to the antique or Verulamian school of gardening; which exhibited straight gravel walks, protected by dense masses of evergreens—by impervious walls of ilex, and phylerea and yew, and cypress; among whose leaves the lingering drops of the recent shower still glittered, and still called forth their spicy balminess.

The Willinghams had just ended their family dinner; and immediately on the conclusion of the dessert—a period devoted by Lady Maria to a private doze in the great arm-chair of her dressing-room—Miss de Vesci had stolen into the garden for the indulgence of a solitary walk. She felt that she had much need of being alone—to commune with her own thoughts—and reflect unmolested upon the extraordinary events which the intelligence of the day had served to

develop. She had by that morning's post received letters of singular importance from her guardian; and she was now intent upon discovering the least embarrassing mode of acquainting her family with their contents.

Eleanor and Claudia, meanwhile, were seated in sullen listlessness, in the old library; engaged, now in ransacking certain obsolete treatises upon archery, for some original costume, to be assumed on occasion of an approaching Toxophilite county-meeting; and now in gazing discontentedly upon the wide solitude of the park;—grumbling alternately against the busy tumult of the rookery—the monotonous rumble of a distant waterfall, and the occasional shrieks of a peculiar breed of peacocks, cherished by Miss De Vesci as having been the favourites of her late uncle. They had no opportunity of discovering Minnie's retreat, that they might intrude upon her evening meditations; for the Bensleigh shrubberies lay basking under the southern front of the manor-house;—an old-fashioned mass of irregularity—perplexed with gables and abutments, and covered by the luxuriant growth of the passion-flower;—while the

library in which they sat, overlooked the great western entrance, commanding the avenue and court-yard.

“What can exceed the bore of a great, unpeopled country-house like this?” exclaimed Eleanor, throwing away her book with an audible yawn. “No neighbourhood—no riding-parties—no pleasant drives—no music—no scandal!—Nothing in this wide world to save one from dying of the spleen, except the weekly appearance of the county newspaper, chronicling all the stolen sheep and gigantic turnips; and the daily arrival of the letter-bag, reminding us of pleasures in which we no longer participate.”

“If Minnie were but like other people, and could be persuaded to fill the house with the society by which we *ought* to be surrounded, these tedious months of retirement might be better endured.”

“Or if the Lisboroughs would take it into their heads to spend part of the shooting-season at Lorton Hall, we should be secure of making it out till the commencement of the Brighton campaign.”

“Oh! you may dismiss that hope!—In my letter, this morning, from Lady Cosmo Somerset, there was an account of the Duke of Lis-borough’s arrival at Wiesbaden. The Duchess, it appears, affects *petite santé*, by way of an apology for being at length compelled to coincide with her husband’s wishes; and drinks the mineral waters of every bathing-place she visits, in order that no one may suspect her of making a tour of pleasure at the instigation of the Duke.”

“What absurdity!—Besides, since Lady Grayfield’s ridiculous marriage with Béthizy, her worshipful tribe of the All-Excellents has fallen into so much disrepute, that I should think even the sulky Anastasia herself might forswear the clan without regret.”

“Nay! Lady Grayfield assures the world that she married Béthizy—totally disregarding her own feelings of repugnance—in order to extend her sphere of usefulness, by making the *roué* a proselyte to the virtuous principles of her sect.”

“I never saw a woman more romantically in love than she was when we left town; or

more insolently contemptuous than Monsieur de Béthizy, in his bearing towards her."

"Henry Mulgrave assured me that he had been heard to say openly, at supper, at Crockford's, how carefully he had paid his court to every heiress and co-heiress within the bills of mortality, before he could make up his mind to sacrifice himself to the jointure of such an ill-conditioned old fanatic as Lady Grayfield."

"In good truth, they appear worthy of each other!—Well;—what have you decided—are our dresses to be green or russet for this forlorn hope of an archery-meeting?"

"Nay, choose for yourself, Nelly!—For my part, now we have ascertained that the Basingstokes are to be of the Combe Abbey party, I have given up all interest in the business;—I have no wish to be extinguished by the brilliancy of Lady Basingstoke's bridal diamonds."

"If it were not for the chance of meeting young Lord Newford, and Sir John Russell, (by the way, Claudia, Mamma assures me that the estates go with the baronetcy, and that old talkee-talkee is now worth looking after,) if it were not for the prospect of meeting *them* at the

balls, I would give up this archery scheme altogether. That impertinent Sir Comyne Wallace will be at the Abbey; and his supercilious airs will mar all my enjoyment of—but who have we here?—a travelling carriage in the avenue, I protest!”

“Can it be Lord Stapylford?—This change of wind may possibly have brought in the India fleet.”

“Do you perceive any arms on the chariot?”

“Neither arms nor liveries are visible; only a valet in the rumble. I am completely puzzled. Can it be any of our London set? Surely you expect none of your old dangles.”

“The traveller is getting out, whoever he may chance to be;—at present I can only decide that he is tall and young—”

“And frightful!—for the mysterious stranger is neither more nor less than our tiresome cousin, Charles Willingham.”

“What *can* he come boring here for? This is the second time his identity has perplexed and disappointed me!”

“Tiresome as he is, Charles will prove a god-send at Bensleigh!—*Faute de mieux*, he will

serve to ride and walk with. Nay! I should not be surprised, Nelly, if we were to quarrel and pull caps for him before his visit is over; Heddeston Court would do very well as a last resource for either of us."

While Eleanor and Claudia were thus preparing themselves for the conquest of their cousin, Miss De Vesci, wholly unconscious of his arrival, was pursuing her evening walk, wrapt in a reverie which did not admit of her perceiving Charles Willingham's approach, till he was within a few paces of her in the shrubbery. While her sisters had left the library to put a few improving touches to their disorderly domestic toilet, under pretence of announcing his arrival to Lady Maria, Charles had profited by the butler's hint that his young lady was walking in the shrubbery, to hasten to the presence of his dear Minnie. He did not, however, appear surprised by the embarrassment of her welcome—he had expected her to be depressed in spirits; and when she accepted his arm to return to the house, from which they were still distant, he was very little astonished to find her silent, and cold in her

demeanour, and tremulous in her step and gesture.

“ You have heard from Lord Lorimer ? ” inquired Mr. Willingham, after an awkward pause.

“ I have,” she replied, again relapsing into silence, which for many minutes and many paces remained unbroken.

“ My dear Minnie ! ” at length resumed her cousin, “ pardon me for thus alluding to a topic which gives you pain ;—pardon me if I presume to express the sympathy of a friend in this bitter trial of your affections.”

Miss De Vesci started. “ Lord Stapylford’s marriage then is no longer a secret ? ”

“ Neither his marriage nor its motives. The intelligence had found its way into yesterday’s evening papers ; and when I left town, all London was ringing with exultation at the mortification his Lordship must have experienced, on discovering that for the inducement of Lady Flora Melrose’s fifty thousand pounds, he had forfeited the betrothed hand of Miss De Vesci—and fifteen thousand a-year ! There were others, however—others who love you, Minnie—whose

exultation was founded upon very different grounds; and who, while they grieve that your heart should be distressed by the insult thus offered to its disinterested attachment—rejoice that you should have escaped the impending evils of so detestable a connexion. Among these I trust you will class your cousin Mary and myself.”

“No! no—*not Mary*”—exclaimed Miss De Vesci, whose complexion had varied with her emotions of surprise and vexation, during the foregoing explanation. “Whatever may be your own opinions on the subject, Lady Lorimer at least does me justice; Lady Lorimer has long been aware that time and womanhood have rendered me sincerely ashamed of my girlish predilection in favour of Lord Stapylford;—and I have this morning received my guardian’s congratulations upon my escape from all further entanglement.”

“And Mary has unkindly withheld this satisfactory information from me!—And yourself, Minnie, why have you allowed me to grieve over the supposed existence of a passion thus fortunately extinguished?”

“Remember how little you have sought my

confidence;—I had no reason to believe you interested in my destiny.”

“ You had every reason—every right!—With *your* intelligence of mind, my dear, dear cousin, you cannot have remained blind to my own long attachment towards you—to my exclusive devotion.”

Miss De Vesci was evidently startled by this abrupt declaration—but she did not withdraw her arm.

“ You *must* have seen, you *must* have known that from your earliest hour of childhood no human being has rivalled you in the intensity of my tenderness—even hopeless as it was of exciting the return I sought. Alas! I had no opportunity of deceiving myself with the shadow of a hope! During your very infancy, Stapylford appeared to monopolize your affections; and although the confiding and open character of your feelings towards him agreed very little with my own idea of woman’s impassioned love, and would have very imperfectly satisfied my own presumptuous wishes, yet I felt that they could not but lead to a premature engagement, fatal to my happiness, and doubt-

fully conducive to your own. The event justified my expectations; nay, even surpassed them! for in the petulance of your self-discontent, you withdrew from me even that degree of affectionate friendship which had hitherto bound us together."

He paused;—till Miss De Vesci replied in an agitated voice—"You accuse *me* of blindness and self-deception—let me retort the charge. Any one and every one might have perceived, previous to Stapylford's departure from England, the gradual change of my feelings towards him. First love is but a sorry thing—a flimsy sentiment in almost every female heart. In mine, it arose from the gratified vanity of believing in Lord Stapylford's exclusive attachment;—from the moment I was undeceived on that point, I ceased to blind myself to his faults. An overstrained sense of duty would nevertheless have urged me to share his ruin;—but although I was mortified and humiliated by his unwillingness to accept the sacrifice, I experienced no change of feeling in his favour. I knew that he was incapable of rendering me happy, and soon learned to re-

joice in the accidents which had insured our separation."

"Yet you appeared miserably unhappy during your stay at Heddeston, after Lord Stapylford's departure?"

"I *was* unhappy!—I was dissatisfied with him, with myself, with you all;—I was perplexed with a thousand embarrassments of feeling—I was degraded by a thousand self-accusations—and I felt excluded from the love and confidence of those, to whom alone I might have applied for counsel and consolation. It was not till I went to Naples, and was thrown, through accidental circumstances, into the intimate society of Lord Lorimer, that I found a companion of my own age, who could sympathize in my feelings, and influence my conduct."

"A dangerous counsellor for a young lady to select!"

"No! Charles—I was securely guarded from all future perils of sentiment;—I more than half suspected your sister's secret attachment for Frederick—and my own heart was pre-occupied."

"Yet you said just now you had already ceased to love the object of your early engagement?"

"I did say so—I do say so," said Miss De Vesci, pausing in momentary embarrassment. "Why should I hesitate to confess the whole truth? You assure me, dearest cousin, that you love me and have *ever* loved me; why—why should I hesitate to own how long my heart has repaid your attachment?"

It would be difficult to describe the wonder, the agitation, the triumphant joy, with which Charles Willingham received this candid and explicit declaration! For long years past he had been ambitious of no worldly possession beyond that of Minnie's preference; a distinction which he had believed to be impossible of attainment. And to hear it thus confessed—thus feelingly proclaimed—was a reverse almost beyond his powers of faith. He was eager to obtain a further explanation of all the incomprehensibilities of the case; and he drew his lovely cousin unresistingly towards the green depths of the shrubbery, that no interruption might invade his present prospects of happiness.

Now that the first bewildering confession had been made, the explanation was sufficiently easy, even to the susceptible delicacy of Miss De Vesci. She acknowledged that on her arrival in Italy she had long meditated a rupture with Lord Stapylford; and that by the advice of her cousin's bosom friend, Frederick Lorimer, she was on the point of acquainting him by letter with her change of sentiments in favour of another, when the sudden death of her uncle, and the miraculous alteration of her destinies, had added new difficulties to the case; although she had been satisfied that the dissolute Montague would be eager to renounce the hand of the portionless Minnie Willingham, the rich heiress of Bensleigh was persuaded that she had no chance of being rejected. She had herself petitioned the dying General De Vesci to render his young favourite, Mr. Lorimer, the minister of his testamentary generosity towards her; yet without consulting Frederick, who she feared might advise a more cautious mode of proceeding, she had written to Stapylford, previous to her departure from Naples, proposing his resignation of all future claim

upon her hand, in consideration of the forfeiture of half her fortune.

“My dear uncle, who disliked and despised Lord Stapylford,” continued Minnie, “had rendered a pecuniary loss the alternative of my maintenance of the engagement between us; and it was natural that I should be willing to forfeit a much larger sum as the purchase of my freedom. My own knowledge of Stapylford’s interested views satisfied me that he would accept my terms; and my guardian, in confirming my opinion, only affected to lament the lavish measure of my prodigality.”

“Heaven knows it was no circumstance for penuriousness!—Your whole inheritance would have been a trifling sacrifice to insure so glorious a deliverance.”

“Not so! dear Charles!—I dared not extend my offer; for I had the interests of my mother and sisters left at my disposal. Besides, I had resolutely determined never to fulfil my engagement, and Montague could only have interfered to prevent my marriage with another,—an event on which *your* total estrange-

ment," continued Minnie in a lower voice, "gave me little reason for calculation."

Mr. Willingham pressed her arm with gratified affection. "Do not call that fellow 'Montague' again; he was ever unworthy to be blest with such a distinction."

"Still less is he deserving of your jealousy! But we will speak of him no more."

"Once more, dear Minnie; you must let me know in what terms he contrived to reply to those of your over-wrought and delicate generosity in his favour, and to acquaint you with his own breach of faith."

"The letter in which he formally and coldly informed me that, foreseeing the impracticability of our future union, he had consulted his own interests by a marriage with Lady Flora Melrose, the eldest daughter of the Governor-general of India, must have crossed mine on the passage;—*mine* which contained the confession of my love for my cousin Charles, offered in terms of contrite expiation of the offence!—Thank heaven! he forestalled me in my race of inconstancy;—and thank heaven I

retain the consciousness of having acted towards him with honour and with perfect disinterestedness. There will be no occasion for further communication between us; and even his reply to my foolish conditions was to have passed through the negotiation of Lord Lorimer."

"And must the negotiation of *all* your affairs, my dearest Minnie, pass in future through Frederick's hands? May I not refer to yourself for an explanation of your present views—your present feelings?"

"No persons are better acquainted with them than Lord Lorimer and Mary; and I am grateful to them for the good faith with which they have hitherto guarded my secret from your suspicions."

"But you will not persist in this unkind reserve?—You will not retract the concession by which you repaid just now my long, long years of hopeless devotion?"

"No!" replied Minnie, overcoming her reluctance, and frankly offering her hand to her enraptured cousin. "No!—I have suffered enough from concealment;—henceforth be all

my thoughts and all my feelings open to your investigation. It would be difficult to point out two persons, who loving each other with truth and constancy like ourselves, have laboured so hard to insure their mutual wretchedness."

"It is true that I have made a miserable lover," said Mr. Willingham, gazing with delight upon the beautiful face that smiled on him so fondly, but my devotion as a husband shall compensate for past omissions. All my days of happiness are before me;—promise me, dearest Minnie, that not one of them shall be clouded by further coldness or caprice?"

This engagement was very readily made and accepted; and Miss De Vesci, in announcing her intended marriage to her mother and sisters that night, had the satisfaction of finding that their surprise far exceeded their disinclination for the measure. They were far more willing that Minnie should unite herself with her cousin Charles, than with Stapylford or any of the numerous suitors who had assailed her in the course of her season of heiress-ship; for they felt assured that a person so conscientious

as Mr. Willingham would desire to pass the greater portion of his time at Heddeston Court, with his infirm father; leaving Bensleigh Park for the present to their own occupation. This measure, however, was proposed by Miss De Vesci herself, to whom Heddeston was as much endeared by early associations as to her lover; while Charles, on the contrary, was the first to suggest that the sum assigned by her uncle to the Westlands, as a *fine* upon her marriage with Lord Stapylford—(and it was evident, by this projected diminution of his niece's fortune, that the old General had been well acquainted with the real character of the young spendthrift)—should be settled upon Lady Maria Willingham, with a survivorship to Eleanor and Claudia. It was surprising how much this unexpected arrangement conduced to the amendment of her ladyship's rheumatism. The opulence showered upon her old age, and Minnie's final succession to the Willingham jewels, which she had resigned so reluctantly into the hands of an ex-Bodham, rescued her from being peevish or nervous during the busy preparations for the wedding; while her daugh-

ters already began to reject their humble projects upon Conversation Russell, the new Baronet.

Little remains to be said of the circle to which they were attached. Calmersfield Park and Lisborough House luckily afford ample space for the complete estrangement of their noble owners, without coveting the sneers of the public by a formal separation. Lady Desmond has become severely evangelical; and Lady Cosmo Somerset, although she occasionally provokes a reprimand from her Lord by her devotion to the pleasures of the world, remains the best of wives and mothers, and the darling of the society in which she moves. Lady Robert Lorton is about to initiate a daughter into the mysteries of the fashionable world; but she has promised both herself and her lovely girl, that she shall maintain a right of free election among the many admirers who have already crowded around her; and even her uncle, the Duke of Lisborough, disgusted with the consequences of prudent and conventional marriages, forgets to urge the dignities of the House of Lorton among the claims instigating her choice. As to Madame la Comtesse de Béthizy, she is said to be grumbling

away the remnant of her fractious days in the third story of an hotel in the Faubourg de St. Germain—for Anastasia no longer retains sufficient interest with her husband to secure his manœuvring sister a retreat at Calmersfield, from the insolent neglect of Monsieur de Béthizy;—and an unintermitting epistolary interchange of discontents between the baffled patroness and her élève, forms the mutual consolation of their useless existence.

The Basingstokes and Lorimers meantime pursue their familiar intercourse with Heddeston Court, under more cheerful auspices. A marriage is talked of between Lucy Barringhurst and Sir Comyne Wallace; and in the numerous connexions arising from Georgiana's match, Lady Barringhurst has acquired a degree of importance in society, the absence of which had reduced her to become the proselyte and tool of Anastasia's heartless tribe. It is said too that her brother, Mr. Henry Darnham—the curate of Heddeston—is likely to increase the dignity of her family by an alliance with Claudia Willingham; who, at the sober age of twenty-nine, fancies herself to have become a convert

to the happiness arising from a calm domestic life ; — but this report wants confirmation. Eleanor mean while has long been laying siege to the paralytic Sir George Wolryche ; whose crutches and flannels do melancholy honour to the ministry of the immortal Ude.

Lord Stapylford still remains a yellow courier at the footstool of his Excellency Lord Melrose, his Caledonian father-in-law. Shortly after his marriage, legal instructions forwarded from India, determined the arrest and imprisonment of Mr. Henry Tichborne—at his Lordship's suit ; on the strength of certain bonds and acceptances of a character so disgraceful, that few persons acquainted with the circumstances and with the parties concerned, were surprised to learn that Tichborne had terminated his existence in the King's Bench, under an apprehension of further exposure. Of all his fashionable associates, Lady Radbourne alone was supposed to interest herself in the catastrophe ; for on finding Mr. Tichborne's private papers had fallen into the hands of his family, she became afflicted with a bilious fever, and retired to her country seat.

It was on occasion of the *mésalliance* of her daughter Lady Clara, with a handsome adventurer of very questionable parentage, that a discussion arose in the little circle assembled for the Christmas holidays, last winter, at Lorimer Park. Charles Willingham, who is now a leading public man, and has been elevated to the peerage by the title of Lord Heddeston, was smiling with gentle irony, at an argument between his own Minnie and his sister, Lady Lorimer, upon the prudence and force of first love ;—Mary—the grave Mary—insisting in its favour, while the animated Lady Heddeston defined it as the wild effervescence of youth—strongly to be mistrusted, and easily to be subdued.

“I have little to say in favour of its constancy,” interrupted Lady Wyndham, who made one of the family party. “For although Gertrude Lorimer was secondary to Mary Willingham in the date of Sir William’s affections, I am persuaded he has already forgotten that any woman exists upon this earth besides myself.”

“In truth,” observed her excellent mother, who occupied a large *fàuteuil* by the fireside,

contemplating the joyful union of her children and their friends, "In truth, the passion of love, like every other passion, assumes the colour and tone of the character in which it exists. In that of my dear Mary and of Lord Heddeston, we are satisfied of its sterling qualities, and are willing that it should stand the test of time. In dispositions of a more volatile nature—dearest Lady Heddeston, forgive me that I include yourself and my own Frederick in this definition—Providence has fortunately decreed that its character should be as evanescent as it was vehement and premature."

"But in either case, how would you wish to find its influence act upon the destiny of the parties?"

"I would have the impulses of youthful affection form *one* among the various arguments in favour of an offered marriage; for the sentiment of love, if not indispensable to the happiness of wedded life, bestows a charm upon human existence such as no moral or worldly advantage can impart. Nay! Lady Heddeston, do not shake your head in reproof of my lukewarm tribute to the omnipotence of your

favourite passion. Believe me, I am justly sensible of its value among the qualifications of wedlock; believe me, I am no advocate for interested or ambitious marriages. Although I have lived until the year 1830—I do not wish to disavow my sovereign contempt for the plots and manœuvres of fashionable MOTHERS and DAUGHTERS.”

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